Morality and the Academic Journey: Perspectives of Indigenous Scholars

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Abstract

Following high profile cross-Canadian examinations of Indigenous[1] peoples and their experiences such as those of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, many universities and colleges have begun to make commitments that support Indigenous engagement; the institutional effort to engage with the experiences, histories, and perspectives of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples to improve the academic journey. These initiatives, called for in many institutional statements of commitment such as those found in strategic plans, support institutional change in which the experiences, histories, and perspectives of Indigenous peoples are central. Many of these initiatives involve the exploration of Indigenous spiritual and religious orientations that may guide personal and academic journeys. In this study, we sought to acquire knowledge on moral understandings that are resident in the consciousness of Indigenous faculty, professors, and instructors working in universities and colleges across North America. This study showed that participants found that their professional situations supported their respective journeys of self-discovery. Participants also reported that their roles were informed by how they navigated Indigenous and non-Indigenous values, as well as how they can support and/or mitigate their institutions' influence upon the advancement of Indigenous engagement. Although much of the professional responsibilities of participants, such as instruction and research, were predominant in their working lives, a prevailing sense of responsibility to the journey of reconciliation and the support of Indigenous engagement was reported.

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[1] In this article, the term *Indigenous* refers to the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples of Canada and related territories.

Morality and the Academic Journey: Perspectives of Indigenous Scholars

In recent decades, Indigenous education has been a developing area of study and practice in primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools in Canada. Since 2015, the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and its 94 Calls to Action has informed how many in education have approached institutional change, which improves Indigenous education. Central to the journey of Reconciliation is an understanding of the experiences of Indigenous people and their perspectives on such things as the world in which we live, the relationship we have or may have, and the problems/challenges that face us all. Given that spirituality and associated ceremonial observances are important to many Indigenous peoples and have been explored in a number of schools and universities, their inclusion in academic and non-academic school programming merits exploration. As many Elders and Knowledge Keepers who work with various communities use moral frames, such as the traditional medicine wheel, in order to provide direction and support, the character of the moral journey may merit consideration, especially in diverse contexts, such as those found in universities.

An increasing concern across various fields of study is that of morality. From psychology to neuroscience, philosophy, sociology, and anthropology, scholars have long been seeking to understand how moral judgements are developed differently across individuals and cultures (Haidt, 2008; Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013; Hofmann et al., 2014; Zigon, 2020). Haidt (2008) commented that morality is the oldest topic of study in the history of the world, as the Code of Hammurabi, the Hindu Vedas, the Egyptian Instructions of Amenemope, and the Hebrew Bible demonstrate. In surveying the literature on this topic, two broad approaches to morality emerge: the consequentialist and deontological models. The former model judges the acceptability of one's actions based on their outcomes; the latter judges the acceptability of actions according to a set of rules, regardless of their consequences (Crockett, 2013). Zigon (2020) expands on this classification and identifies *virtue theory* and *natural law* as suitable frames for the analysis of morality. Virtue theory, with roots in Aristotle's Nicomachean ethics, argues that "what is virtuous can only be determined in specific situations" (Zigon, 2020, p. 24). Natural law, on the other hand, stems from Stoic thought as it "unites all of humanity as moral beings through the right use of reason" (p. 26).

A departure from the revealed codes of conduct resident in many religious orientations, morality as it may be understood by Indigenous people, is often conceptualized as contextual and experiential (Cordova, 2004; Stonechild, 2016, 2020). Stonechild (2016) observes that "Western knowledge tends to be reductionist and limited to the rational mind. It treats knowledge as something 'outside' and foreign. True knowledge is more holistic and flexible" (p. 64). For many Indigenous peoples of the prairie regions of North America, morality is generally guided by the seven principles, which stem from the Seven Sacred Teachings: respect, courage, love, generosity, honesty, humility, and wisdom (Stonechild, 2020). While some similarities between the Seven Sacred Teachings and religious sets of commandments may be cited, Indigenous morality is responsive to ever-changing human relationships (Stonechild, 2016). Such understanding seems to resonate with Johnson King (2023), who argues that "it is unclear precisely what the content of Morality is—or, in other words, precisely what one grasps when one grasps Morality" (p. 4). The notion that emerges from explorations of morality in Indigenous consciousness is that it is not adequately reflected in codified and unchangeable prescriptions upon behaviour, but rather a dynamic journey for which cyclic and intercultural features of Indigenous experience are central.

The holistic and flexible character of Indigenous morality is reflected by Gregory Cajete (1994), who explored the principles of Indigenous moral and religious views. Cajete observed that such moral frames as best seen not as codified sets of rules or guiding principles, such as those found in Christianity, but rather as a process for understanding right and wrong and acting accordingly. Cajete's work was cited by Friesen (2000) when he explored how morality is understood by Indigenous peoples: "The traditional First Nations' metaphysical belief system did not adhere to an overall, organized description. It was a way of life, not carefully catalogued delineation of major and minor doctrines, subdoctrines, and corollary beliefs" (p. 12).

At a general level of analysis, Indigenous morality may be understood in this way. It is a landscape upon which the holistic and flexible character of right and wrong is not only something to be observed but experienced (Deer, 2018). There may be guidance offered by frameworks of principles, such as those in the Seven Sacred Teachings, but it is the responsibility of the individual to navigate this moral landscape in a righteous manner.

Since the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action in 2015, universities throughout Canada have been striving to Indigenize their institutions through such efforts as "providing equitable employment opportunities for Indigenous faculty and staff and centering the needs of Indigenous Peoples in teaching and research" (Universities Canada, 2023, para. 3). One of the benefits of having adequate number of academic staff who have knowledge and experience in Indigenous knowledge and consciousness is the support they may offer to Indigenous students, colleagues, and community members in their respective academic and personal journeys. This study sought to investigate how Indigenous understandings of morality may be resident in the Indigenous experience of Canada, specifically in post-secondary educational contexts. Through the acquisition of data on how morality may be understood, the results of this study contribute to the growing academic works out of Canada and elsewhere that explore how Indigenous knowledge and belief systems may be made resident in ostensibly secular educational contexts. Furthermore, this article evidences the many ongoing challenges in the pursuit of genuine academic Indigenization and reconciliation in Canada.

Indigenous Morality in Canadian Higher Education

Despite institutions' apparent efforts to Indigenize academia, Indigenous Faculty members across different fields in Canada have consistently expressed the challenges they face when seeking to meaningfully integrate Indigenous perspectives into the academic and non-academic aspects of environments on campus (Doria et al., 2021; Habermacher, 2020; Louie et al., 2017). Besides contradictions in such Indigenization efforts and the incongruencies Indigenous scholars face in their institutions (Louie, 2019; Louie et al., 2017; Steinman & Sánchez, 2023), many scholars have also registered the ongoing pervasiveness of racism and 'microaggressions' in Canadian universities (Glauser, 2019; Henry et al., 2017; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019). As Henry et al. (2017) state, there is a "lack of adequate mechanisms in most Canadian universities to address racism, racial harassment, and bullying, or the inhospitable climate faced by racialized and Indigenous scholars" (p. 8). Such realities may pose obstacles for the integration of Indigenous knowledge, heritage, and consciousness into the university ethos. It is such integration that may best support Indigenization, which will in turn support the academic and spiritual journeys of Indigenous peoples who study in Canadian post-secondary institutions (Deer, 2024; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018).

It is within the scope of Indigenous engagement that many post-secondary institutions are exploring how support for the academic and spiritual journeys of Indigenous students, faculty, and community members may be improved. As Deer (2024) stated:

> The moral frames of Indigenous people have become to be reflected in some aspects of content and programing in schools, universities, and colleges. In a number of institutions in Canada, frameworks for morality are put forth by invited Elders and community members who employ this notion of process, reflecting the act of relationship-making and/or restoration. (p. 7)

The relevance of this development was one focus of Stonechild (2016), who observed that "if virtues are undermined, this results in the weakening of relationship ties, the invisible spiritual bonds that hold a community together" (p. 60). As Canadian universities continue to be shaped by colonial ways of being and thinking (Schaefli & Godlewska, 2020; Yeo et al., 2019), such ontologies and epistemologies must be examined, deconstructed, and re-constructed in light of Indigenous knowledges.

Any genuine reconciliatory effort must strive to broaden the horizons of moral conceptualizations and recognize how Indigenous ways of knowing may (and must) co-guide education, and that is the rationale that drove this study.

The Study

The purpose of this study was to acquire knowledge on moral understandings as they may be resident in contemporary Indigenous consciousness. The research team consisted of Frank Deer and Rebeca Heringer. Deer is Kanien'kehá:ka from Kahnawake. Having previously taught elementary school in a Cree community in Northern Manitoba as well as in the culturally diverse Inner City of Winnipeg, Deer's work and experiences as a Kanien'kehá:ka educator has informed his contributions to his areas of research. Heringer was born and raised in Brazil and began to learn about Indigenous knowledges and morality in Canadian contexts after she moved to Winnipeg in 2016. In a spirit of cultural humility and reconciliation through her academic endeavours, Heringer seeks to promote anti-racism education, anti-oppressive research methods, and the holistic well-being of racial minorities in Canada.

With a focus on how Indigenous scholarship may consider this topic, this study's research questions were: 1) What are Indigenous Faculty members' understandings of morality? 2) What sources of knowledge are associated with such understandings?

After receiving their signed consent form, 14 Indigenous Faculty members of various national backgrounds and academic fields were recruited from universities in Canada and the United States. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant, either online or in person. The initial guiding questions posed in the interviews were designed to foster a climate of discussion in which participants would share narratives: 1) Please tell me about yourself (e.g., national identity, home community), 2) Please describe your experiences in working with Indigenous knowledge, 3) To what extent has spiritual knowledge and teachings been a part of your experiences?, 4) In what ways has morality been a part of your experiences/learning? In the spirit of narrative inquiry, participants were invited to share their views, experiences, and insights; it was through this process that issues related to Indigenous morality emerged.

Pseudonyms were attributed to each participant to protect their identity. Any identifiers (e.g., name of the university) have also been removed during the transcription process and replaced

with a word that would retain their meaning (e.g., "name of the university"). Each participant had the opportunity to review the transcript of their interview and make any edits they deemed necessary. An inductive thematic data analysis process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) was conducted, and the emerging themes are presented in the following section.

Findings

Six main themes emerged from the data analysis: self-discovery; practical values; influence of non-Indigenous values; values through professional practice; responsibility; and Indigenous vs. institutional values. Each of these themes helped delineate how Indigenous Faculty members have come to conceptualize morality the way they do, how their understandings have influenced their lives, and the challenges they face when seeking to exercise such values in their daily work.

Self-discovery

Each interview began by allowing participants to share a little bit about their background, such as their national identity, cultural identity, home community, and anything else they thought would be germane to the conversation. As such, each participant commented on how they came to understand themselves as being an Indigenous person, what or who influenced them, and where they see themselves in that journey.

For some participants, that learning came early on through their upbringing: "My mom worked really hard to raise me in a cultural, spiritual way, which she was supported by my dad to do. So I'm very grateful for that because it makes me feel... complete" (Star). Sparrow, who notes that any cultural teaching was absent from his education at school, also said: "I was fortunate enough to have my mother, who was very, very adamant to engage in culture as much as we could, as much as she could and us as growing up."

Yet, a common observation among those who were raised with Indigenous teachings was that this was done experientially (such as jigging, sash weaving, beading, moccasin making, fishing, hunting, and traditional harvesting activities), without necessarily labelling it as "culture":

> I would say that in terms of Indigenous knowledge, we were lucky that we practice and still do like hunting, fishing. We make maple syrup every spring. So I don't think we [say] like, 'oh, I'm doing Indigenous knowledge stuff' today. You just kind of do it, right?

For some participants, however, their Indigenous identity is something that was developed only later in life, whether because they did not know they were Indigenous or because they were not taught traditional teachings. Tiger, for example, felt that there was something different in him, but which he would only understand as an adult:

> It came later, you know, I mean, there was always something, there was always something. I felt like my relationship to the world and nature and… how I could I say… I subconsciously knew that it was something I inherited from the one that ancestors that wouldn't give meaning to that, you know, even in hunting and killing an animal and eating it, that something was missing. And it was culture. It was how you framed that. But I sensed that. I knew it was there.

In a similar vein, Dove observes that only later in life was she able to start understanding the importance of her Métis identity:

> Because I felt, even as a teenager, very disconnected, not understanding who we were and how much power, how powerful that makes you feel to acknowledge who you are as an

Indigenous person and to be able to be proud of that and learned that through a lot of teachings and the local and participation in our own community that was really missing in our family, part of that.

Some participants, therefore, express feeling as though they had only just begun this process of self-discovery and the implications it brings for life:

> I just feel like I'm at the start of a journey. I feel like I still have a long way to go to... I don't even know how to say this, but to like…to not feel like an imposter. I think that might be the best way for me to say that. And it's something too that I want my children to know about that culture. And part of me feels a little bit lost, because I didn't grow up really embracing the culture. So now I'm like, okay, what do I need to do to make sure that I can pass on the culture to my children? But I'm still learning about the culture myself. So, for me, I still feel like I have a lot to learn. (Butterfly)

Regardless of when their self-discovery journey began, all participants revealed a myriad of values which they carry with them today, as the next section will depict.

Practical Values

For most participants, the morals they affirm today stem from their upbringing and the Indigenous knowledges with which they were taught. As Macaw puts it:

> I guess for me, the morals come from those stories, right? So, not only those interpersonal stories that are told, those experiential stories, but also our stories of our legends. Like that, Nanabush, for example, figures largely amongst the Anishinaabe. You can learn a lot from those stories. And that's where our morality comes from. I think part of our morality comes from anywhere other than, of course, from the Creator. (Macaw)

Rainbow, who notes having been raised with her aunts, comments that their teaching was sometimes direct, giving her instructions on what to do. But for the most part, she observes, she would simply "watch their eyes, to see what they're thinking," that is, pay attention to what they were doing and learning from that. Tiger shares a similar perspective, observing that his Indigenous knowledge came "directly by growing up in the community and seeing it, observing it, and then of course, living it."

With her aunts, Rainbow was taught the virtue of humility and to serve others (during a ceremony, for example) without seeking recognition:

> And you serve the elders first. Notice that an elder doesn't have food, you go and do it. These little things that the behind the scenes that happens at these gatherings. I've kind of taken that on as something that I think is really important, that humility that you're not the ones taking up space in the room, but you're doing the important work. People might not notice that you've done it, but they would notice if it wasn't happening, kind of work and not doing it for recognition, but doing it because it's what you're supposed to be doing.

Indeed, the importance of family was mentioned by some participants as being a key aspect of their identity today. As Snow observes:

> We Métis people, we look out for one another. Family is important. We take care of our family. We always make time for our family. There's always room, right? Like if family asks to stay, if there's room on the floor, there's room for family. With all these different things that I was always being told and just how we functioned around food, like sharing

food, and around visiting, and always having food, and you know, just different things that I grew up understanding.

Within the family, Tiger commented on the strong role played by women, the matrilineal value, which is still strong in his family. Also, within the family, Snow learned the importance of hard work: "My mother would say, 'Métis, we're hard workers. We work really hard. We're not lazy.'"

Sparrow grew up understanding that virtues have the purpose of fostering cooperation and peace, which entails telling the truth and not gossiping or backstabbing:

> The most important thing is that you want to have peace among your people. That's why gossip was such a bad thing. Like the top, top thing that our old ones never did. You know, lying. Was it bad? Really bad, stealing was bad. You know, even above murder. All those were the top ones. You know, gossip and lying were the scourge upon the people because they bred discontent.

Through stories and ceremonies, Tiger was instructed about the value of reciprocity with the animals and the earth, as opposed to greed or selfishness. Similarly, generosity was fundamental to Star's upbringing; it was "baked into most ceremonies" and evident in the relationships she witnessed.

But participants who were not necessarily raised with Indigenous teachings also comment on the values they came to learn later in life. For instance, Bear mentions that she took a course during her PhD program, which was focused on the Seven Sacred Teachings that "changed my world":

> That was really foundational and pivotal in just my beginning to spiritually incorporate those ways of knowing, being, and doing. And I always include feeling because feeling is the first thing we have. You have to feel something before you can do it, right? So you have to feel it in order to know it.

As the next section will show, other influences have also played a role in how participants came to shape their worldviews today.

Influence of Non-Indigenous Values

Most participants commented on the influence the Catholic church has had on their lives. Daisy commented:

> I definitely think Christianity has been an influence in my life and also shaping my worldview … because one of the things out of the Christian tradition that I grew up in is that part of our reason for being in the world is to be change agents for good, positive things.

Macaw shared a similar view:

> I grew up in Roman Catholicism. The church was very important in my community and my family, particularly my grandparents. … I would say that it probably influences our understanding of spirituality in many ways. … I think that some of our spiritual practices are definitely modelled after Christianity. I think most people probably don't realize it.

Some participants, on the other hand, did not see a great connection between religious influences on their lives today. Others, like Eagle, observed that the influence has been a negative one, given the mistreatment of Indigenous children as he was growing up. Notwithstanding, Eagle evidenced

the value of courage as he commented on his fighting against the oppressive educational system he was immersed in: "I decided that wasn't going to happen to me. They weren't going to kill my love of learning, right? So I persisted, I just kept on reading and studying and things I didn't have to, I would just read." He continued:

> But when classroom discussions came up … where one of the nuns was talking about Columbus discovering America. So, you know, we were seniors in high school or juniors in high school at the time. So I raised my hand, and I corrected her. I said Columbus did not discover America. Columbus never made it to America. Columbus made it as far as the Caribbean, and Columbus murdered all these Indigenous people, and Indigenous people were here. (Eagle)

A different perspective was shared by Sparrow, who stated that the value of gratitude was taught to him, without necessarily making any religious connection to it: "the way my mom taught us was, 'you be thankful for the food' and you don't necessarily have to formalize your prayers at every meal."

Conversely, because of her negative experiences with the Catholic church, Rainbow states that she has often pushed back against any influence from it, which is something she needs to be attentive to when teaching:

> I have to check myself, especially because so many students are Christian. I want to make sure that I'm not allowing any sort of bias into my teaching or, you know, grade or something. For example, when I'm teaching indigenous education, we often reflect on our own upbringings. And so sometimes it can be hard to read all these Christian stories about, you know, like families coming in and being missionaries and all of these things, like trying to keep trying to not react to those.

As the above quote demonstrates, participants' worldviews are intrinsically intertwined with their professional practices, which is something the next section will explore in further detail.

Values through Professional Practice

When discussing their professional work, participants evidenced how their values are woven into practice. The most recurrent virtue discussed by professors interviewed in this study was that of relationality and the importance of building trust and collaboration, be that in the position of a teacher or as a service provider. For example, as a doctor, Dove observed how she began her career trying to incorporate the 'Western perspectives and ways of thinking' she was taught in medical school and residency. Then, she started noticing that her work in the community was not being well received, and people in the community stopped coming to her. She understood the reason later: "I was engaging with medicine up here [pointing to the head] and I realized where I needed to engage with medicine was down here [pointing to the heart]." She then learned to "honour people and the stories that they had …, to greet people and love them and meet them where they're at and to not judge people, [and] to bring humility back into medicine." Dove claims this was "one of the most powerful teachings I've ever received as a physician." She concludes:

> And I think that started me down the path of like, this is how you could integrate those two things together … I don't think I'd be a doctor anymore if I hadn't gone back to engaging with my Indigenous ways of knowing. And those teachings, which I feel like are so much more embedded in my heart than anything I learned at Medical school. (Dove)

In a similar vein, in her teaching, Macaw also seeks to communicate to students "the importance of maintaining good relationships":

> Underlying what we're doing with the students is teaching them how to develop and maintain good relationships with whomever they're working with, whether it's patients, their patients in the future or whether it's elders… So, you know, teaching students about how to develop a good and positive relationship, I think, is important because this is kind of like what holds us together.

As Dove pointed out, it is this kind of collaboration that can lead to meaningful reconciliation. Bear complements this understanding when she states:

> And if you're open to working with people in that way, you're closer to being on a path towards healing for yourself. Because we all have had trauma in our lives. We just need to be able to connect to the right person that can help us see the things in our lives and help lift us out of the things that hold us back. And that's what trauma does. It holds a lot of us back.

The importance of relationality seems to go hand in hand with the virtue of humility. In his work as a health service provider in a new institution and different place, Peacock deems of utmost importance to spend time getting to know the people he is working with, "attending ceremony and figuring out how things are done here before I continue with what I was doing when I was in [the other province]."

> In their teaching experiences, professors seem to have plenty of opportunities to share their Indigenous worldviews. Some participants, like Snow, expressed how they were acutely aware of how their Indigenous identities were informing their practices: "I understood who I was, as a Michif, as a Métis person, and what that meant. And so then it was learning how to be a teacher." (Snow)

> For instance, Star believes in the importance of holistic education, especially in order to protect their identities. She tells her students:

> I want to focus on your whole being. And so we'll try our best to integrate all of these other things … we're going to try and integrate your emotional, your physical, your spiritual health in addition to your intellectual growth... I think that students appreciate that I'm trying to make a relationship with them and that that relationship is just supposed to support them in all of their development, not just one class.

Tiger shared a similar perspective: "I've always tried to bring those things, in terms of not maybe the ceremonial but the idea of the balance into a classroom to talk about what is a medicine wheel or whatever's grounding that knowledge." This was echoed by Daisy who stated that: "the way that I teach and mentor my students is also modeled out of Indigenous ways of knowing, right? Where it's like about storytelling."

For Snow, a major driving force in her scholarly work is to promote a better understanding of the Métis identity:

> One of the things is hoping that by doing some of these research and articulating sort of a more clear understanding of what that means to be and know and how we learn as Métis, that will also help in terms of, sort of like not really solidifying, but like supporting other

people beyond our own community in understanding that we are distinct, that we're Indigenous, we're not half of anything, we're our own people.

Through their scholarly work, participants also evidence the value of sharing knowledge with others. Tiger, for example, stated that he had just submitted an article whereby he "got a chance to talk about what my dad had taught me about culture and spirituality and Indigenous knowledge that he had gained from his grandfather, my great-grandfather." As such, he could "tell stories that my father gave me, handed down to me and other stories that were actually handed down to me, but maybe handed down to someone else."

In reflecting upon how their practice informed their approach to doing well by their Indigenous background, Bear affirmed the importance of helping others:

> As Indigenous people, we practice ways of helping that are very different from non-Indigenous ways of helping, and that comes from that knowledge that has been around for a long time because it helps us understand that we need to help in a way that's really who we are as Indigenous people. We have to centre those ways of practicing.

Indeed, most interviews revealed ways in which participants hold a sense of responsibility as an Indigenous professional, as the next section will outline.

Responsibility

Whether in the role of a teacher or as any other kind of service provider, participants demonstrated being acutely aware of the responsibility they have, not only as a professional, but as an Indigenous person in their workplace. In the classroom, Daisy observes that she feels a greater responsibility towards those who are marginalized: "I do prioritize connecting with Indigenous students and students of colour. … Those are the students we try to work hard to be available for." As she later explains, this is particularly to help students "see someone who may have some similarities to them, even if it is just the fact [that] we both carry the label of Indigenous." (Daisy)

With regard to the content being taught, participants shared how they put great effort into sharing the values they believe to be necessary for students' professional lives, especially with Indigenous communities:

> The values around care, which are family and connection and work … I do feel like I have an obligation to their future to share the things that I know … when I look at myself and sort of think about what unique things I have maybe to offer. And it's those things that I then try to share and to pass on, you know, and part of that is like navigating higher education, making good career decisions that are maybe unconventional…. I try really hard to make myself available as a mentor (Daisy)

Oak also points out the importance she sees in mentorship, which is something she seeks to offer as an Indigenous scholar to support "Indigenous knowledge in academic settings." Bear observes that in her classes, she may, for example, look at the utility of fire, water, trees, as well as the importance of one's emotional and spiritual well-being, evidencing many values embedded in her lesson: "there is a process for all of these things and it's all about, you know, building humility, respect for the land, respect for the animals, the things that sacrifice their lives because trees are their life, right?"

Macaw adds to the conversation, observing that her job is "to prepare students to be culturally safe physicians." Alluding to the value of building trust, which she had discussed earlier, she proceeds:

> So I guess that is implicit, this responsibility that I do feel that I need to prepare these students to be able to provide that kind of care … I guess my goal is to educate them in such a way that they will understand how to behave respectfully … and when they're practicing physicians, that they're going to understand that people have all kinds of different experiences and that there's, you know, reasons why patients might be saying or not saying things.

Bear also emphasizes the way in which a person's spirituality is not something that can be dismissed by a service provider:

> But morally, like only because of my own experience, I want to help families, and I want to help families get back to healing and reconnecting to who they are, like just spiritually. Just because you need to know who you are. In order to work with our people, you need to have a connection to your own spirit because you can't help people if you are not connected to your spirit. And our people genuinely know when someone cares about them.

But while participants may claim, as Rainbow did, "I feel really strongly about making sure teacher candidates feel comfortable with going out and teaching Métis content," as Oak observes, "bringing Indigenous knowledge into the classroom entails a particular responsibility." Oak elaborated:

> I like to think I deliver my content in a particular way that is not retraumatizing students, but I think it's sort of like all of a sudden having these topics come up that just by nature of the topic would be retraumatizing. I think that it's important to really think carefully, which but for me, like the resistance from students that are pushing back or like presenting like residential school denialism or sort of like our times when I'm really concerned about students in the classroom that might be feeling traumatized by those sorts of negative occurrences.

Institutions' strategic plans and policies were also pointed to by some participants as being a responsibility they embrace. For instance, Lily observed that her university did "its own little internal TRC and task force," which contributed to the development of an Indigenous Learning Center and other supports to help students navigate the system – an effort that she believes also has to come from the faculty members.

Star notes that she "push[es]…colleagues to hire people of color and Indigenous peoples." In a similar vein, Butterfly states that the admission process in her institution has changed for Indigenous applicants:

> That was something pretty important to us, the way that we would engage with the applicants. It just didn't feel right. It didn't feel good. And so we now bring on a knowledge keeper or an elder for all of our interviews.

The same participant also commented that she was working with another colleague "trying to create a personalized land acknowledgment that speaks to the [name of school] so it's not just a check the box kind of thing. I really can't stand that."

Most participants discussed how they seek to make the most out of the opportunities they have when designing their curriculum in order to incorporate Indigenous knowledge. However, they also express great respect and see their responsibility often entailing bringing Indigenous knowledge keepers or Elders to help guide the classroom discussion. And as Bear points out, "when you see [Indigenous knowledge] being incorporated into university education, I think that this knowledge is healing. You know, there are opportunities to heal."

But such responsibility goes beyond the boundaries of one's workplace. Many participants also expressed feeling responsible for giving back to their community. For instance, Snow feels responsible to give back to her Métis community, who have supported her journey becoming a teacher: "I worked hard to get this PhD, now how can I use it to benefit my community?" Therefore, she seeks to focus her time and attention on what her community expressed to be necessary for them, such as Michif language revitalization. Bear shared a similar perspective, declaring that "my only wish is to be able to contribute to a community that invested in me to go to school."

However, as the next section will present, many are the challenges that participants encounter in their daily work, evidencing a tension between their Indigenous values and those of the institutions where they work.

Indigenous vs. Institutional Values

The most common challenge participants seem to experience in their institutions is the feeling of being used merely as a box to be checked. As Oak observes:

> I feel like I am constantly asked to get on different committees, sit on different tables, so that they can sort of like check the reconciliation box. But oftentimes I find that I don't have a voice in those spaces. And I've even been learning to be a little bit more protective of what I agreed to do or what I agree to participate in.

Oak also comments on several tokenistic efforts taking place in her workplace, such as smudging in a faculty meeting:

> I didn't think that was appropriate at all. And it seems like a superficial gesture. And if we are going to like, why do they want to have a smudging ceremony to open our faculty meeting when there are only one or two Indigenous faculty members among the 80 people that will be there, what is their intention? And if they wanted to have a smudging ceremony, and this is my opinion, then they should not have invited an Elder to do that, to introduce faculty members in the room instead of putting that on them to do. It just felt very performative.

Tiger also emphasizes how, in his institution, he frequently witnessed reconciliatory efforts that are empty:

> Part of it is a spectacle as a machine. Even without evoking calculation… Part of it is token. Part of it is like, oh, okay, reconciliation time, let's set up this and that and let's invite an Indigenous faculty every time we have an event for everything and make sure we check the books. In the end, it means nothing, you know?

Peacock also observes that he is often asked to provide a quick and simple guide to traditional Indigenous knowledge to be objectively studied in his field. But as Star observes, Indigenous

knowledges stand in a completely different dimension from Western ones, and are not something that can be simply merged. For instance, she comments with regard to achievement:

> The way indigenous knowledge works is not the way that Western knowledge works. It doesn't work with grades. It's not about that type of achievement … you only get as good as you give, regardless. It has nothing to do with grades. (Star)

As a consequence, participants are often found having to prove themselves to the academic community:

> And I think the Indigenous people themselves, the faculty themselves, have been pushing constantly for that, and you know, making a lot more work for ourselves doing that, but doing the evaluations so people, the non-Indigenous people, can see that this person has done this amount of work. This is what we consider Indigenous work, and it's equivalent to scholarly activities, kind of this idea. So this is what we do. What we do is, you know, you do extra to make it visible to them. (Lily)

Or as Daisy puts it: "We often spend a lot of time having to make the argument of how [something] is evidence-based when it's not like evidence-based in the Western framing of health interventions and evidence." Daisy also observed that although she would seek support from her Elder council to make professional decisions, this is not something she felt comfortable sharing in her workplace at first, for in the Western worldview, a neighbour, brother, uncle, etc., is not deemed a qualified professional:

> I felt like I had to do a lot of justifying and explaining of like Indigenous perspectives and knowledges coming in. Whereas now, because of my different place in life and different place in the institution, etc., I don't feel like I have to justify myself anymore, but so now I can kind of just be more inclusive and incorporating it into the things that I do.

Therefore, besides facing racism and lateral violence, participants daily experience the challenge of having to "walk in two worlds," that is, to be "conversant in Indigenous knowledge and academic knowledge" (Star). Participants want to incorporate their Indigenous worldviews into their work, but feel how incongruent those are in academic framing and thus feel that they are constantly pushed back. For example, Star, for whom generosity is a key value, as mentioned earlier, observed how "[generosity] is incongruent with what the university is, which is the corporation, essentially. So that's frustrating." Or in Tiger's words: "There is quite a misunderstanding about what is meant by Indigenous knowledge in universities, or when we say traditional knowledge … they think it's a kind of pity thing that's not serious." What this participant is citing is a phenomenon in which traditional Indigenous knowledge is not an important part of academic activities or culture, but is accepted for purposes related to the increasing attention paid toward such things as equity, diversity, and inclusion policies.

A prevailing view amongst participants is that, despite bringing a wealth of knowledge and experience with them, academic institutions continue to fall short of being genuinely welcoming to Indigenous scholars and their ways of knowing. Numerous participants cited a lack of involvement and consultation in academic decision-making. Many stated concerns about not being enabled to develop new course programming that focuses on Indigenous topics. Some stated that their respective institutions or colleagues were forthcoming in their disrespect for Indigenous knowledge and its use in scholarly activities. This study points to a need for increased

accountability and initiative on the part of universities in North America to better address Indigenous engagement.

Discussion

One of the perennial needs of academic programs of post-secondary institutions (regardless of discipline) is to host learned scholars with expertise that is relevant to their respective academic programs. Thus, a department of physics would require physicists with sufficient knowledge that support learning and research within the discipline of physics. Although academic disciplines develop over time, such that the specific expertise required of new scholars is subject to change, it is the disciplinary expertise of academics that is considered the most important aspect of their qualifications for their respective academic roles.

The relatively new area of Indigenous engagement has amended the frame through which institutions view the disciplinary qualifications of new scholars, particularly those who study in areas that are germane to Indigenous engagement. As intimated earlier, developing concerns associated with reconciliation have contributed to the emergence of Indigenous engagement in such a way that indigenization has become an important part of institutional change. Gaudry & Lorenz (2018) produced a valuable framework for understanding indigenization in which their conceptualization of decolonial indigenization has become the vision for approaching Indigenous engagement. In this frame of indigenization, decolonial approaches to scholarship, including research and teaching, are centralized in an institution for which the production of knowledge is reoriented within an institutional ethos for which relations of power are made equitable. These sorts of changes are necessary to adequately address some of the realities of the contemporary university, where curriculum is predominantly Eurocentric, approaches to research are frequently grounded in non-indigenous mores and imperatives to which researchers must abide, and Indigenous students find themselves studying in institutional contexts that are at least culturally foreign and at most unsafe. Post-secondary institutions of research and learning must unsettle and dismantle settler colonialism – for this is the approach that decolonization demands (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

What this means for the current discussion on academic expertise is something like this: any discipline that wishes to incorporate Indigenous perspectives into their academic programming will have to confront what many cited here have adduced—that in addition to the disciplinary content knowledge, scholars ought to be prepared to explore the unique manifestations of Indigenous knowledge, heritage, consciousness, and tradition that may be germane to their field. Although this claim may seem controversial for some who have essentialized the features of their respective discipline, the notion that there is an interpretive frame that provides a bridge between facts and values lends support to the notion that Indigenous worldviews have become acknowledged as a valuable frame between academic matters and the efforts of Indigenization. One aspect of Indigenous worldviews that has been employed in service to Indigenous engagement is that of spirituality. As the reconciliatory journey of post-secondary institutions has developed, spirituality resident in learning, research, and student support has grown.

The themes that emerged in the analysis may be understood to reflect the understandings held by participants in two general ways: those themes that reflect traditional approaches toward morality and those that emerged through professional interface. Regarding the former, there appeared to be little controversy amongst participants regarding what constituted traditional Indigenous knowledge in their lives and the sources for it. Regarding the latter, some participants

reported that some understandings of morality were informed by their interaction with other Indigenous faculty and staff.

Although an emergent theme of its own, the topic of responsibility was a prevailing and recurrent feature of the moral frames of participants across the emergent themes. Participants made frequent mention of commitments to such things as community, traditions, and collective values; it was clear that participants felt that they had obligations to go about their academic work while maintaining Indigenous approaches, as well as to support students through their guidance. What ought to be considered by institutions of higher learning that are committed to Indigenous engagement is to consider how Indigenous conceptions of morality (e.g., responsibility) may be resident in the ethos of the institution that will support the academic and personal journeys of Indigenous students, staff, faculty, and community members.

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