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Accountability, ethics and knowledge production: racialised academic staff navigating competing expectations in the social production of research with marginalised communities

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ABSTRACT

Universities, both in Canada and throughout the global North, are predicated on empiricist and positivist understandings of knowledge and knowledge production which are communicated and strengthened through research practices and protocols. Drawn from a larger study exploring research leadership among accomplished academic staff, this paper examines interviews with eight racialised female academic staff who focus on social justice research predicated on co-producing knowledge with marginalised communities. Building on the rich scholarship which conveys the consequences of systemic discrimination for racialised and Indigenous scholars working in Canadian universities, we explore how participants navigate systems that fail to understand their epistemological and methodological orientation towards research and consider what it reveals about research culture and claims of inclusiveness in the Canadian academy. Drawing on Sara Ahmed's work on performative diversity in academia, we consider how academic structures, protocols and policies associated with research influence the social production of knowledge and resist change toward greater equity and Reconciliation demanded of Canadian higher education.

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Introduction and literature

Racialised academic staff in Canada

Despite public statements by Canadian institutions claiming to address racism and value diversity and the development of equity initiatives at institutions, the experiences and employment outcomes of racialised academic staff in Canada demonstrates the failure of Canadian universities to successfully transform into more equitable institutions (Henry et al., 2017). Research on race, racism and academic staff in Canada shows that racialised academic staff¹ are more likely to be paid less (than white or non-visible minority staff) (CAUT, 2018; Ramos & Li, 2017), be less likely to, and experience

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delays in, achieving tenure and promotion (Wijesingha & Ramos, 2017), experience racism and microaggressions at work (Henry & Kobayashi, 2017; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019), encounter obstacles with research productivity and publishing (Davis et al., 2022), and are less likely to be in senior leadership positions (Cukier et al., 2021). Within the social sciences, the small number of racialised academic staff coupled with the absence or silence when it comes to research on race and racism, Indigeneity, gender and sexuality (Smith, 2017) demonstrates the pervasive whiteness of the Canadian social sciences. Unsurprisingly, racialised academic staff and graduate students report feeling themselves to be bodies out of place in their universities (Mohamed & Beagan, 2019; Park & Bahia, 2022). Notably, these outcomes are not restricted to the Canadian context (Naepi, 2021; Rios et al., 2020).

This persistent exclusion from the academy is coupled with demands for the time and expertise of racialised academic staff, including being asked to serve as representatives on equity committees and supporting racialised students and colleagues. This extra workload is not acknowledged by the university in its rewards structures, despite contributing to the academy's equity and diversity work (Dhamoon, 2020; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019). Racialised academic staff are also often asked to do translation work and to support the university in repairing relations with marginalised groups (Goddard-Durant et al., 2021; Peltier, 2018). Ahmed (2012) has theorised that this type of repair work is used by the university in the creation of recovery narratives, wherein the university confesses to past racism and is now presented as in a process of repair. Currently, Canadian universities undertake what Ahmed (2012) describes as performative diversity initiatives, which focus on creating the appearance of an inclusive university, without developing effective tools for redressing racism and colonialism (Dua, 2009; Dua & Bhanji, 2017). Canada's research-intensive universities produce many policies related to equity (Tamtik & Guenter, 2019) including initiatives directly related to research and scholarship such as prioritizing equity focused scholarship, addressing inequities in research through strategic research funding, and tracking scholarship holders identities (e.g., gender) (Jones et al., 2020; Tamtik & Guenter, 2019). This policy work, although often identifying structural inequalities, tends to be focused on the use of initiatives focused on individual change (Campbell, 2021). This study examines the experiences of racialised researchers working with marginalised communities, considering the extent to which Canadian universities' public commitments to equity translate into change in research practices.

Knowledge production and neoliberal accountability in the Canadian academy

Universities, both in Canada and throughout the Global North, are predicated on empiricist and positivist understandings of knowledge and knowledge production which are communicated and strengthened through research practices. How knowledge is conceptualised and organised in Global North or metropolitan universities cannot be separated from broader power relations and histories of empire (Connell, 2007; Lund et al., 2022), knowledge production in the academy thus privileges white, male, middle class, heterosexual perspectives (Beltrán & Mehrotra, 2015). This is specifically relevant in the social sciences which consider social tensions (class conflict, gender inequality) through an 'over-arching theory of progress' (Connell, 2007, p. 18). This system of knowledge and knowledge production is maintained through specific gatekeeping practices including

guidelines from funding bodies, ethics protocols and publication processes which persistently re-centre European epistemologies and methodologies (Beltrán & Mehrotra, 2015; Henry et al., 2017). Consequently, even when universities hire racialised academic staff or purport to permit critical disciplinary research, there are many parameters around what gets to count as research.

Neoliberal imperatives further limit and shape how research is undertaken, by prioritising research productivity, individual accountability and knowledge perceived to have economic worth (Beltrán & Mehrotra, 2015; Lund et al., 2022). Methodologies and epistemologies grounded in values of interdependence and shared knowledge making are in conflict with the needs of the neoliberal academy (Stein, 2020). Academic staff who work collaboratively with marginalised communities to engage in research that perceives knowledge as collectively made and held, driven by values of collaboration, instead of productivity and commodification (Park & Bahia, 2022; Peltier, 2018), disrupt the hierarchical relationship between researcher/researched (Baice et al., 2021; Naepi, 2021; Rios et al., 2020), making the academy a difficult place to work. Researchers are expected to conform to institutional norms, adhering to gatekeeping practices that delineate what counts as research, which methods are valued and which journals ‘count’ towards career advancement (Henry & Tator, 2009; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019). Failing to do so risks one’s career (Bowleg, 2021). Our focus is specifically on the power dynamics racialized scholars must navigate, rather than risk management processes which affect all researchers.

The priorities of the neoliberal academy conflict with publicly espoused commitments to equity and engagement following the recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC).² Thus, engaging in collaborative research methods and valuing relationships with marginalised communities more highly than institutional rewards centre priorities which conflict with the academy’s demands. More specifically, projects premised in co-producing knowledge rely on relationship building, establishing trust and ensuring reciprocity entail acknowledging that project timelines must match the needs of relationships (and not vice versa) (Naepi, 2021; Peltier, 2018; Rios et al., 2020; Stein, 2020). These research collaborations often carry the extra labour of repairing trust and working actively not to reproduce abusive and extractive research methods. Thus considerable effort and care may be required to establish reciprocal relationships (Goddard-Durant et al., 2021). Such practices challenge the academy’s incentivisation of projects that are efficient by adopting methods which meet the time demands required for the development of non-hierarchical partnerships (Goddard-Durant et al., 2021; Manathunga, 2019; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019). For racialised scholars who undertake collaborative research with community, they also carry the additional labour of justifying and explaining their work (Mohamed & Beagan, 2019). While the academy values detached, efficient and productive research, collaborative methodologies demand time and focus on producing meaningful research.

Negotiating competing expectations related to accountability in the research process is challenging, as institutional expectations that researchers prioritise the needs of the academy and its modes of knowledge production (Stein, 2020) conflict with research predicated on the needs of the community, with a goal of transformational change (Bowleg, 2021). Further, institutional timelines and expectations often interfere with community-based collaborations grounded in equal power sharing (Findlay, 2020; Peltier, 2018). As a

result, researchers struggle to make their methodologies intelligible to the academy as the epistemologies and ontologies that ground this work have been deliberately excluded from, and devalued by, the academy (Findlay, 2020). The lack of recognition or value accorded non-western epistemologies is a tool of dominance that impedes efforts to decolonise knowledge production and avoid the voyeurism embedded in many dominant approaches to research conducted about/in marginalised communities (Park & Bahia, 2022). Although additional labour is required of all researchers undertaking projects with marginalised communities, this workload is compounded for racialised researchers, who are also expected to serve as conduits between the institution and the community (Mohamed & Beagan, 2019; Peltier, 2018). This additional service work is often rendered invisible in productivity metrics and is disproportionately borne by racialised academic staff.

Collaborative social justice research methodologies organised and produced with marginalised communities mark a significant disruption to the university's modes of knowledge production – signifying the possibility that the university might lose control of its power to define and delineate knowledge production.

Methods

The social production of social science research in Ontario universities

The larger project from which this article draws explores the social production of knowledge of social science research in Canada with specific attention to research funding. Following ethical approval, interviews were conducted with 19 professional staff and 27 academic staff from four disciplines (education, social work, sociology and geography). Academic staff were selected based on their focus on social justice as a means of exploring how research work on social justice fits into conventional research structures (applying for grants, career advancement, etc.). Academic staff were also identified based on their having successfully obtained research grants from national research councils, international funding bodies, or regional research funding.

The interviews were organised around open-ended questions focused on several areas of research. All interviews were transcribed and have been analysed, coded using grounded theory and critically discussed by project team members (Charmaz, 2014). Through this process, we identified this subset of interviews ($n = 8$) in which participants focused extensively on their responsibility and commitment to marginalised communities and disconnection between institutional structures and their research practices. All participants in this subset of interviews are female racialised academic staff. The focus on connections between institutional equity work and research practices was a secondary factor in examining these interviews together. Participants connect their institutional equity contributions with their work as researchers; thus, it is helpful to examine how they navigate expansive and competing demands for their expertise and time. The eight participants come from three of the four social science disciplines included in the project and are from multiple universities ranging in size and research intensiveness. We used racialised to describe the participants to preserve anonymity; participants often used more specific language to refer to their identities. In the interviews, participants identify the challenges they experience in undertaking

collaborative research projects with marginalised communities. By highlighting how academic systems and policies, particularly research ethics boards and research ethics protocols, conflict with attempts to establish ethical research relationships, they offer a powerful illustration of how the Canadian academy maintains narrow and exclusionary approaches to knowledge production even whilst claiming to be more equitable and engaged in Reconciliation work.

Results

Social justice, community and research methods

Acknowledging the university as a colonial structure, participants considered their research an opportunity to do things differently by foregrounding social justice values and the concerns of communities. Despite accelerated demands for research productivity and policies that normalise depoliticised approaches to knowledge production, Wendy explained her reason for prioritising community needs,

I didn't go into academia just for myself and my career, I went in it because of the impact. That's where I struggle still in my job. How is this relevant? Why is this important to do?

Rather than approaching research as a scholarly exercise, Crystal reflected on her goal of disrupting the academy to bring about change,

I think that the way that the world is arranged is unjust and I believe that it is my responsibility to work with others in order to bring about better social relations and better ways of being in relation to land to work against forms of exploitation ... trying to intervene on the academy and the harm that the academy does. I'm trying to actually disrupt the power that academics have in order to articulate the world.

Mary explained her work as an educator, researcher and community member overlapped and coalesced around her politics.

I'm trying to create a community of learners who have similar language ... that will make us comfortable to talk about a topic without feeling 'oh, my goodness, I cannot say this because there is a white person in the room,' or a white person 'so I cannot ask this, because there are other racialised people in the room.' It's trying to collapse the boundaries, the historical boundaries that have prevented us from having frank conversations.

Participants understand that their work differs from perspectives that the academy expects or desires. Participants explain how their values are put into practice through collaboration with communities as co-producers of knowledge. Brenda describes how this shapes the development of research questions,

The idea or the topic or the area or whatever of the research, comes from community ... what does community want and how can I be of assistance to them? And how will it benefit them?

This required participants to navigate competing expectations from universities and funding bodies. As Wendy explained, the academy privileges particular ways of orienting research,

The research [at the university] only seems to appreciate SSHRC, CIHR³, but that is so parochial, because that's not the reality of what it looks like on the ground ... [agencies] are saying 'we don't find your work relevant.' ... the university is very behind.

Community needs remained the priority of participants, resisting pressure to adapt their approaches to institutional needs. This informed how projects were conceptualised and operationalised. Brenda considered the project team's development and organisation as integral to affirming commitments to community.

Who might be interested in participating in a research project? And who might benefit from participating? ... One [priority] is capacity-strengthening for research in community, but also, I'm learning from them. I have my own notion of what research is and what it means for me in this context, the academic context, but what does that mean for them? It might look different ... So we work together to create an agreement about what that might look like and usually involves having Elders involved ... and then anyone else who might be interested.

Challenging conventional models of research in these ways often resulted in delays, as participants navigated institutional research expectations not predicated on such extensive collaboration.

Devaluing equity work

Participants were acutely aware of what is valued in the academy, noting the disproportionate amount of institutional service work that racialised academic staff are expected to undertake (often through equity, diversity and inclusion service). Michelle explained how this works in the Canadian academy,

The institutions work very smoothly for a white man of a certain class and all that sort of thing, but the rest of us who get pulled on to every committee they have about diversity, have every student coming to them that feels like they don't belong in this space, who cares deeply about these issues so says 'okay, sure, I'll do it.' We move through the space very differently and have profiles that look differently because of that.

Although content to benefit from this labour, Michelle noted, the academy does not fully acknowledge the value of this work. Wendy highlighted how the scale of this work is not understood,

[It] is not uncommon for racialised faculty [to] do service committees in the school, but because you are committed to doing work in your communities, then you end up ... still do[ing] that workload in addition to the service that you do in the school.

This devaluation of equity work also extended to knowledge production. Michelle recalled a mentor advising her to avoid working on race and racism as 'there's no longevity in it. It's not something that people are going to fund.' Censure from colleagues was often less direct. Danielle became aware that senior colleagues had been denigrating her research by suggesting it would be more aligned with another university known for its focus on social justice. She remained undaunted, explaining,

Ultimately, I say 'my record speaks for itself', it is what it is and so I'm not naïve ... I take it as a badge of honour. Thank you. Yes, I love the research they do over there. I think we should do more collaboration.

Eschewing institutional metrics, she measured success by the extent to which the research project meaningfully affected ‘all of the people that it’s incorporated and encountered’. Some, like Mary, developed strategies to make research more palatable to a white academy,

I think at the beginning, I was a little bit naïve in terms of calling it racism and so I’ve toned down my language. I call them challenges ... difficult situations, difficult encounters and historical moments that need to be resolved.

Despite critique and dissuasion, participants persist in finding ways to enact their values through research.

Collaboration with community

While challenging normative academic presumptions of who is ‘a researcher’, Wendy highlighted the benefits of remaining grounded in social justice values and collaboration,

When you find like minded people within institutions that are just as passionate as you about social justice, but they also have institutional power internally, it’s amazing what we can do.

To meaningfully engage communities, Christine discussed the need to first address histories of harm done by researchers,

Our goal is to promote reconciliation through a forum with which we can also promote collaboration ... But first of all we have to create a safe language, a safe space for everybody to come together ... Indigenous communities do not, because of their experience with colonisation, trust non-Indigenous institutions and researchers.

Participants specifically organised research projects and teams to disrupt the position of academic staff as primary knowledge producers. Debra described the expertise of community members within research teams,

[they] are going to have all kinds of information that I have no clue about, so I learned as much from them about how to do research in a variety of ways, but also things that I would never have thought about in terms of what [they] are going through ... [They] are very helpful for the research participants, as well, when they hear there’s people like them on the team, that’s another sort of level of interest, relationship building, trust ... it’s all these different kind of layers of people and what they bring, and I don’t believe that the only researchers are people with PhDs.

Wendy also valued the expertise of community research partners and their specific knowledge and understanding of protocols and work with communities. Brenda explained the reciprocal benefits of hiring community members,

That’s part of the model, that I’m learning just as much from having those folks on the project and their input into every aspect of it, than I’m teaching them ... it’s not just guiding people along. Those people bring a set of skills that we don’t have in the institution. They bring their own knowledge to the project, and that has to be acknowledged.

The remuneration of such labour was critical, as the (under)valuation of community members’ labour and expertise emerged as a persistent theme in the interviews.

Gatekeeping and disconnection in research ethics

The ethics approval process was consistently identified as a key institutional barrier for researchers whose methods diverge from dominant approaches and are thus unintelligible to research ethics boards (REBs). REBs typically presume that projects must receive institutional approval prior to any contact with research sites/participants. Christine explains how this diverges from the reality of collaborative approaches. 'I don't walk into a research project with questions, because you have to build relationships with partners first'. However, such connections are often interpreted as a source of bias or unethical conduct by REBs. Prioritising the use of community ethical protocols resulted in tensions for academic staff who must navigate REB processes which see the academy as the sole or central process for approving research projects. Brenda explained these competing expectations,

What [communities] want to see, and want to think, from their own lens of values, teachings, what they would see as important, being put into some of those documents ... I have come across some challenges in the past in understanding or mitigating what an institutional policy looks like and then what community expectations are.

Similarly, Christine describes how this affects her project work,

REB members are not educated about community-based research partnerships and this often leads to delays in approving the project, despite extensive agreements having already been developed with partners.

Participants then are left to mediate between community expectations and REB practices. Debra explains the additional labour required,

I've had to do a lot of work around getting them to understand ethics from an Indigenous world view versus ethics that the Research Board has.

Although valued as cultural translators and as conduits for institutions seeking to establish relationships with marginalised communities, these connections created by racialised academic staff were often less valued from a research ethics standpoint. This impacts all phases of the research process, including engaging participants as Debra discusses,

Because communities are small ... the chances are I'm going to know a lot of those people ... but they don't get the thing about relationships and this and all the things that you need to do in order for people to make informed decisions around participating in projects ... the relationships in the research that I do are much more complicated than throwing a flyer out there and then people will come to you. It just doesn't happen that way. It takes a lot of work and the participants want to get to know you.

Participants noted the significant labour required to make their work understandable to REBs and to pursue the relational work required for their research to take place. One risk is that this work will be miscategorised as service, which is least valued among the teaching, research and service trifecta that typifies permanent academic staff labour in Canada. As many participants were also involved in equity work in their institutions, and between communities and institutions, their research methods can be misinterpreted as service by the institution who benefits from this labour as evidence of commitment to diversity.

Indigenous partnerships, ethics, and tensions with academy

Despite frustrations with navigating institutional systems, some participants acknowledged that increased awareness of historic and contemporary inequities was leading to some changes, both within institutions and among national funding bodies. Following the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Final Report on the Residential School system, SSHRC began developing separate protocols specifically for research involving Indigenous communities. Debra describes navigating this shifting research funding landscape,

Trying to understand exactly how to make what you want to do fit with what they [SSHRC] want is, I find, very challenging. So having to learn how to do that in order to get the funding but not straying away from the Indigenous ways of doing things ... the bigger funders, now they are negotiating with Indigenous communities around ethics and protocol.

Incremental changes were being implemented, albeit predicated primarily on the vulnerability of Indigenous peoples. Participants note how some new protocols add layers to existing processes rather than addressing structural issues. Crystal, a recognised expert on protocols for conducting academic research with Indigenous peoples, highlighted the systemic nature of the problem,

I cannot believe how long it takes to get through REB ... the university solutions to Reconciliation or the university approaches in response to things that we are calling for, either as Indigenous People or just people who are paying attention to the more exploitative aspects of the university. Their solutions just make more work for us.

She notes how new processes are more convoluted and fail to respond to advice from Indigenous people regarding ethics protocols. Christine discussed that although possibly well-intentioned, the resulting guidelines of the 'decolonisation of Tri-Council' remain a barrier to collaborative research. Envisioning an alternate path, Brenda reflected upon a complete revisioning of the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS)⁴ to bring Indigenous ways of being into protocols. Advocating for revisioning the epistemological and methodological basis of the research apparatus, she discussed a recommendation for addressing power imbalances (between Indigenous communities and academia),

The community engagement plan ... needs to sit in community, where community can put their own ... lens of research ethics on particular projects ... it brings the research into the context of an Indigenous understanding of ethical protocols or ethical dilemmas or ethical considerations.

This would support academic staff who are stuck navigating competing expectations, strengthening their ability to establish reciprocal research relationships.

Participants articulated how interpretations of ethical parameters created obstacles to collaborative research with Indigenous communities. For example, ethics protocols set by REBs and through the TCPS understand research through an empiricist lens, thus excluding necessary structural supports for potential research participants. Debra explains the resulting obstacles to broad engagement in her work,

Things that people are going to need to support them to participate ... transportation, honorariums, childcare, but a lot of times the feedback around those kind of things ... it could be seen as bribing people.

Debra's experience demonstrates the narrowness of the ethics system that informs institutional ethics processes. Brenda notes similar barriers when applying for research ethics and funding approval,

It's a constant challenge to be able to bring in Indigenous ways of being into the research context ... Like for instance, feasting. I can't invite community advisory members to come together and do work without providing some things ... but we have a policy here 'We don't fund for snacks or refreshment for any meetings that are less than an hour and half or two hours long'. So those university policies [are] ... hindering how I would like to do research. Why is the food important? It's more than just nutrition for the body, it's actually feasting the work. That's not a concept that's seen here as important.

By not acknowledging the importance of 'feasting the work', the ethics processes privilege institutional policies, at the expense of integral relationships. Some participants struggle with the REBs to make their methods understood resulting in either spending additional time in review processes or opting to cover some costs personally. The disconnect in values is most evident in how institutions reward expertise and leadership, as Brenda shared,

If I go and ask for an Elder or community member or advisor, 'this is how much you can pay them, \$50.' Really? That's what you would offer someone for their knowledge in some other context? ... Sit down with a lawyer and give them \$1500 to advise us on a policy ... How do we look and frame knowledge? What is important here? I wouldn't be able to do some of these things without the folks sitting around that table.

This example signals whose knowledge is valued. Serving as gatekeeper and protector for the institution, REBs cannot conceive of or understand ethics from other perspectives. This leaves academic staff to determine how to safeguard the reciprocal and collaborative relationships they have built from the academy's demands for efficient and productive modes of knowledge production. Thus, participants show how institutional policies and processes engender power, influence how research is conceptualised and undertaken, and constrain collaborative knowledge production.

Discussion

Drawing on Ahmed's work on the concept of the limits of inclusion through procedures/processes, gatekeeping and collegiality in relation to complaint (2021), we explore how academic structures, protocols and policies influence the social production of knowledge. Ahmed's (2012) concept of performative diversity is also used to interrogate how institutions' public declarations of commitment to equity may be understood as performative (Ahmed, 2021), thus making visible how research practices shape knowledge production to serve the academy's interests. We seek to excavate the inner workings of the research landscape, which as Michelle commented, 'work well for some'. As Ahmed (2012) notes, those who do not conform to normative expectations have unique perspectives on barriers not visible to others. Acknowledging the limitations of the narrow disciplinary focus of this study and sole focus on researchers engaging in projects with a social justice focus, these findings nonetheless offer a preliminary exploration of the unique barriers experienced by racialised researchers. Future research on a broader range of disciplines will further contribute to and complicate our understanding.

First, we observe how collaborative research with marginalised communities is grounded in knowledge systems that are in tension with the dominant epistemologies

embedded in institutional research policies and protocols. As participants recounted, their approach to research is predicated on relationships with communities characterised by reciprocity and a commitment to shared knowledge production. This troubles many of the assumptions about academic staff identities, including that racialised researchers will primarily identify as researchers, disciplinarians and members of the academy (Barrow et al., 2022). This lack of alignment, between their identities and normative constructions of ideal academic staff, had repercussions for their work, as their relational grounding in community was perceived as suspect by institutional research policies, predicated on the assumption that academic staff are driven by their disciplinary interests, and committed to knowledge making through conventional methods. Thus, their identification with community and their use of research methods that include community members as co-producers of knowledge, disrupts the separation the academy presumes to be necessary between researcher/researched and challenges the academy's system of knowledge production (Rios et al., 2020). These tensions between academia and participants were evident in difficulties experienced with research ethics boards (REBs), which are predicated on a particular understanding of ethical practice.

Second, participants' experiences illustrate Canadian academia's narrow conceptualisation of research and how institutional structures influence whose knowledge is produced. REBs were identified as a gatekeeping mechanism which maintains significant barriers to community research with marginalised communities. Canadian academic research ethics have its epistemological grounding in Global North interpretations of ethical practice and largely preclude the possibility of, or misunderstand the tenets of, relational-based systems of knowledge. Thus, expectations that projects should follow normative research methodologies created barriers, including rigid timelines not compatible with collaboration, impeding or interfering with relationship building and co-development of shared understandings of research (Naepi, 2021). Further, methodologies not aligned with conventional scientific practice were often questioned as ethically suspect. REBs can be seen as what Ahmed (2021) would describe as a door, a portal through which researchers must go. The obstacles that marginalised academics can experience in the process of promotion can feel like a heavy door, which 'you have to work hard to open. You come to know that the door was not intended for you from the difficulty you have opening it' (p. 232). The barriers created by REBs for racialised academic staff undertaking community research with marginalised communities can be seen similarly – the difficulties participants experience demonstrate that these ethical processes never intended for them to occupy the position of researcher or for their research to take place in the academy, despite avowed commitments to equity. The difficulty of the process illustrates how the institution is intended to function (and for whom).

These barriers persist despite increased attention to equity driven processes, such as efforts to respond to the Calls for Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Despite newly established protocols, research ethics in Canada remain steadfastly predicated on normative research protocols which preclude more collaborative work. Consequently, Indigenous approaches to knowledge production continue to be devalued and largely unintelligible to REBs, resulting in misunderstandings and delays. Such mechanisms of power are designed to make the epistemological dominance disappear, by providing the illusion of action while not actually accomplishing what they name (Ahmed, 2012, 2021). The framing is also important, as protocols are grounded in the

premise of Indigenous trauma, victimhood and deficit and reinforce the belief that institutions are best able to judge what is ethical. This paternalistic stance precludes Indigenous communities having a central place in defining research ethics. Ultimately, as Crystal recounted, the new policies make it more difficult to get approval for research *with* Indigenous peoples. New policies promise a more inclusive research apparatus, while rendering invisible structural exclusion.

Third, these researchers deepen our understanding related to the conditional acceptance of racialised academic staff in universities (Ahmed, 2012). Participants illustrate the difficult conditions and tensions they experience in navigating competing expectations of accountability and belonging. Despite academia's avowed commitments to equity, their experiences demonstrate the entrenchment of the Canadian academy's 'institutional habits' (Ahmed, 2012, p. 126). Participants interrogated the extent to which academia is willing to go from abstract commitment to meaningful change. Imagining a more inclusive Canadian academy, would require a shift from focusing on institutional priorities towards the questions, needs and knowledge making systems of marginalised communities and scholars, and a consideration of what it means to research ethically in ways that account for the importance of relationships.

Conclusion: ethics, relationships and accountability

We are left to consider the possibilities if academe would more broadly interrogate or trouble what it means to be ethically engaged in research. Racialised academic staff who engage in collaborative research with marginalised communities find their work rendered incomprehensible in an academic system predicated on racism and colonialism and structured by positivist epistemologies. Their work shows how research protocols foreclose the production of knowledge which challenges its central role as arbiter of research. Further, this research demands more time to build reciprocal relationships in communities and navigate the demands of the institution. Their methods exemplify ethical practice that prioritise accountability to communities, in sharp contrast to the performative diversity work endemic to the Canadian academy.

Their insights prompt consideration of if or how academic staff are asked to critically discuss the intersection of ethics, accountability and relationships in our research practices. To open this discussion, we offer several questions: how and by whom has ethical research practice been defined? How, when and in what ways, are researchers asked to account for ethics in their work? What would a university that looks for evidence of ethical practice look like (beyond an ethics approval from a research ethics board)? Importantly, when we reflect on ethics, we must also consider how relationships matter in research practice. Along with researchers, both within and outside the academy, we invite discussion of what relationships matter in our research work. To whom, specifically and in what ways, are we accountable? Can discussions of accountability and ethics shift focus towards relationship and community even whilst the neoliberal academy demands otherwise? We ask these questions to interrogate the rigid structures of the academy, both in Canada and internationally, and to challenge the limiting frameworks made available for understanding the significance of relationships and communities in research.

Notes

1. We use the term ‘racialised’ to emphasise the socially constructed nature of the concept of race. Racialisation refers to the process by which the racially dominant groups mark those perceived as racially different as ‘other’.
2. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was established in 2008 to educate Canadians about the history of Indian Residential Schools and the impact on the children forced to attend by the Canadian government. The Report includes 94 Calls to Action directed at specific institutions and groups; the Calls to Action are the culmination of a process designed to address the ongoing impact of residential schools on survivors and their families.
3. Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR) are two national research funding bodies.
4. The Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans is a joint policy of Canada’s three federal research agencies – the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and all universities are required to abide by these standards. Research ethics boards at individual institutions draw up their guidelines in direct reference to the TCPS as it is perceived as the best standard for research ethics.

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