Indigenous Epistemologies, Worldviews and Theories of Power

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Dana Hickey¹

The study that this paper is based on is a Master's Thesis, the purpose of which is to understand Indigenous epistemologies of power from the standpoint of Indigenous participants who are originally from or currently living in the Sudbury and Manitoulin Island areas of Ontario, Canada. Indigenous research methods are privileged throughout, and key aspects of grounded theory are woven in to add support. Comparisons between the Indigenous epistemological concept of power and the Western theories of power of mainstream academia are made, as are relevant criticisms of Western epistemology.

Fifteen Indigenous participants were interviewed. The central category that arose from the data was relationships. This central category ties the other main categories together which are: language, sacred sources of power, Indigenous women, abuse of power, and knowledge. The findings indicate that there are many forms and manifestations of power which are related to each other. The source of power is in the interrelatedness of everyone to everything else that is known and unknown. Humility, harmony and balanced relationships produce the healthiest and most magnificent manifestations of power.

This paper argues that understanding more about epistemologies of power will help illuminate a pathway by which Indigenous Peoples and Canadians of settler ancestry can better understand one another, creating the shift in these relationships that is required in order to gather large-scale support for reconciliation and for ethical distribution of power resources in Canada.

Keywords

Power, Indigenous epistemology, Indigenous methodologies, Theories of power, Indigenous power, Indigenous philosophy, Indigenous relations, Indigenous knowledges

Introduction

The research study shows that Western theories of power demonstrate a worldview that requires force and/or coercion power to maintain order in society

(Hickey, 2019). This worldview underlies colonial doctrines of discovery and claims to settler-state land title, and it justifies the oppression of Indigenous populations in colonial states around the world (Schabus, 2017). Furthermore, Western epistemology considers its methods superior to all others. Indigenous epistemological knowledge, theory, policy, and law are marginalized and disregarded (Burrows, 2007; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Hart, 2010; Walter & Aitken, 2019). The Indigenous worldview of power developed in this research reflects the intelligent organizing power of the universe toward balance and harmony. The re-

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¹Dana Hickey, Master of Indigenous Relations, Laurentian University, Anishinaabe, Dokis First Nation, dl_hickey@laurentian.ca

search examines how differences in epistemological understandings of power between Indigenous People and non-Indigenous people of settler-ancestry, in part, explain the devastating health effects that unethical distribution of power resources have had on Indigenous People since colonization.

Adding Indigenous epistemologies to the academic conversation about power calls attention directly to a contrast in worldviews. Indigenous People know that economic and social systems based on Western epistemological logic are not sustainable (Deloria, 2003). Western economic and social systems result in poverty and other alarming social inequities (Walter & Andersen, 2013). Reconciliation as a pathway to improved health for Indigenous People is required; however, misunderstandings on an epistemological level are revealed as barriers. Learning more about the value of Indigenous epistemologies will help bring about the understanding required to address the misapprehensions between Indigenous People and Canadians of settler ancestry, and create a respectful space for co-developed solutions to emerge.

In partnership with the Indigenous community of M'Chigeeng First Nation on Manitoulin Island in Ontario, Canada, the study seeks to understand the meaning of power, as a phenomenon, from the perspective of 15 Indigenous participants. The value of the research is demonstrated by its applicability to the issue of problematic relations between Indigenous People and Canadians of settler ancestry. The journey toward reconciliation is obstructed by the complexity of the issues. Using philosophy and epistemology, the research aims to address the complexity and illuminate a pathway to reconciliation.

On Epistemology

Canadians of settler ancestry see the world differently than Indigenous People do, and the converse is also true. In the words of Indigenous scholar Linda Smith (2000), "We have a different epistemological tradition that frames the way we see the world, the way we organize ourselves in it, the questions we ask, and the solutions we seek" (p. 230). Epistemological differences underlie conflicts between Indigenous Peoples and settler governments; however, little is widely known about epistemology. This includes the fact that there are many epistemological systems and world-

views besides the Western system.

Epistemology is theory of how we come to know things, and is often referred to as "the theory of knowledge" (Proudfoot & Lacey, 2010, p. 118). It is an enquiry into the nature and grounds of knowledge (Proudfoot & Lacey, 2010). Epistemological questions include: What is true and what is false? (Vidal, 2012). What are the sources of knowledge? What can one know? How does one know if something is true? (Chilisa, 2012). If you ask these questions to a Western-trained scientist, you will get answers that differ from those that you will receive from an Anishinaabe Elder who participated in this study. Even the social scientist would prefer to make a statement of truth based on facts that were proven scientifically, or at least she would support whatever statement she makes with the strongest factual evidence she has. Epistemologically speaking, the Western-trained scientist's standard of proof is different than the Indigenous Elder's standard of proof. Indigenous Elders will tell you what they know from lived experience and from the knowledge conferred on them by their Ancestors. Much of the knowledge that is carried forward is accepted as truth because it has always been known to be true. I argue in this paper that both truths are valid, as are the methodologies that are utilized to arrive at these truths.

Theories of Power

Power is an elusive concept; there are endless ways to think about it. During my research on what is known about power in Western academia, I encountered many similar statements. Peter Digeser (1992) observes that the debate over power ranges across political ideologies, methodologies, and disciplines. Robert A. Dahl (1957) remarked that the concept of power is as ancient and ubiquitous as any that social theory can boast. Indigenous scholar, Taiaiake Alfred (2009), recognizes the existence of power in all the elements that make up the universe, and describes how Indigenous philosophies teach us to respect and accommodate that power in all its varied forms. The literature review includes selected theories of power that provide a well-rounded overview of the power debate.

Western philosophy was born in ancient Greece in the fifth and sixth centuries BCE. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle are famous for pondering the

philosophical questions of life and society during this period (McInery & Caponigri, 1963). We know through Plato's writings that Socrates believed that those who hold the power in society should be virtuous and properly prepared through philosophic education (Brooks, 2006).

Plato echoed Socrates' idea that people who exercise power should be endowed with expertise in political governance and philosophy (Brooks, 2006). In the *Republic* at 426d, Plato argues that the right to hold power is not conferred by majority approval or by material wealth, but by expertise in statesmanship (Grube, 1992). Socrates is the main character in the *Republic*, and through him, Plato defends justice and describes the perfect city in which democracy is rejected in favour of rule by philosopher kings.

In Book II of *Politics*, Aristotle critiques Plato's ideal state, thereby initiating the practice of scholarly debate – an academic tradition that endures (Aristotle, 1995). In Book III of *Politics*, Aristotle records the various types of government that he has observed, including monarchy, aristocracy, polity, tyranny, oligarchy, and democracy (Aristotle, 1995). Later in Book III, in similar style to Socrates and Plato, Aristotle declares that those who are most virtuous have the strongest claim to all rule (Aristotle, 1995).

These three philosophers laid the foundation for what has become a longstanding debate about the phenomenon of power, and upon which a range of theories of power are built. Aristotle's typology of regimes was so successful that it ended up being used extensively until the time of Machiavelli, nearly 2000 years later (Clayton, 2004), and is still called upon to this day.

Machiavelli's *The Prince* is notorious for its cruelty and ruthlessness. In its pages, we find images of power as domination and control, which is to be exercised over others, and society constituted through the domination of the weak by the strong (Haugaard & Clegg, 2009).

In Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*, he contended that humans are by nature unruly, and therefore, discord exists among them. To seek shelter from this state, humans willingly form governments. This idea forms the basis of Hobbes's social contract theory in which he argues that citizens should come together and agree to sacrifice their power (over others) to a central authority, in exchange for safety from each

other in the state of nature (Hobbes, 1997).

John Locke was also interested in the social contract and the state of nature. For Locke, the people consent to be governed, but the people can also withdraw their consent, overthrow the ruling power, and set up a new government. Therefore, power is essential to the running of a peaceful commonwealth; however, this power over, or force power, must be vigorously checked and controlled (Moseley, 2005). This is Locke's version of liberalism, wherein constitutionalism, limited government, and the right to life, liberty, and property prevail (Locke, 2015). Locke's liberal philosophy was immensely influential and was embodied in the American Declaration of Independence in 1776 (Dewey, 1963).

Norbert Elias highlighted the functional interdependence between people (Dunning & Hughes, 2013). Power is not something that is possessed by one person and not by another, instead, power is a structural characteristic of a relationship – of all human relationships (Dunning & Hughes, 2013). It is therefore difficult for one person, or group of people, to control outcomes, since their intentions and actions are always moderated by others upon whom they are dependent, and all outcomes; therefore, represent the interweaving of countless individual interests and intentions (Newton, 1999).

This is the point where an interesting philosophical turn is made, and the structural and relational aspects of how power dynamics work come into view. Michel Foucault's thoughts on power also focus on power relationships. Foucault insisted that power cannot exist on its own, in the absence of a relationship. The term "power" designates relationships between partners (Foucault, 1994, p. 135). "Power exists only as exercised by some on others, only when it is put into action" (Foucault, 1994, p. 137). Furthermore, power is not only rooted in government and in institutions, it exists wherever relationships exist, practically everywhere. Power relations are rooted in the whole network of the social (Foucault, 1994). Therefore, whenever people interact, there are power relations present, whether we are aware of the power relations in our interactions, or not.

In the 1960s, a movement toward the study of community power generated an interesting debate about power relationships. It began with Robert Dahl's examination of the community of New Haven,

Connecticut, which focused on decision making as an important factor of analysis (Dahl, 1961). Bachrach and Baratz (1962) criticized Dahl's use of decision making as a standard of measuring power, since it reflects only the direct aspects of power, as we know it to function in democratic societies. They argue this constitutes only one face of power, and they direct us to what they coin as the second face of power – the restrictive face that prevents certain members of society from participating in the process of decision making (Bachrach, P. & Baratz, 1962). Steven Lukes (1974) adds a third face, the normative face of power that influences, shapes and determines the very wants of community members. The skilled application of normative power can prevent real issues from arising, if community members willingly accept their role in the social order, or are unaware of their interests. Peter Digeser (1992) brings the fourth face of power by describing how the powerful decision makers are “created over time” by the influence of social power, which is then put into operation when we participate in discourse and norms (Digeser, 1992, p. 982). An important point to consider here is that power does not exist independently of those practices; however, in the writings of Indigenous scholars, I find that power is an ever-present force, or flux, that originates from a sacred source.

The Western theories of power show the direction that the academic conversation about power is headed. The philosophical assumptions that underlie the mainstream theories have not been fully expanded to include an understanding of power through an Indigenous epistemological lens. Western conceptions of power are, therefore, incomplete because they are based only in Western knowledge. If we can know more about the phenomenon of power from an Indigenous epistemological standpoint, then perhaps we can begin to glean solutions to the power imbalances and the misapprehensions that stand between us and reconciliation.

Methods

Being of mixed Indigenous and non-Indigenous ancestry in my identity and my education, I chose to combine Indigenous research methods (IRM) and Western grounded theory as a practice of theoretical and cross-cultural dialogue. Holistic IRM are used to

present an overall picture, and to explain the concept of power from an Indigenous epistemological standpoint. Indigenous methods are meaningful to the Indigenous participants, who derive power by sharing their knowledge and by seeing themselves reflected in the holistic narrative about what power means to Indigenous People. Western methods are used to deconstruct the story, reducing it to its basic structure, so that it can be presented thematically, and in a manner that encourages dialogue across Indigenous and Western knowledge traditions. Presenting the research in this interrelated way allows for a conversation between what is currently known about power from a Western viewpoint, as well as from an Indigenous viewpoint.

First, an Indigenous decolonization research framework was designed to provide the structure of the overall project. This framework addresses the structural inequalities produced by colonization, and it is important for establishing three things in this research: that anti-colonial Indigenous theoretical perspectives will be privileged throughout; that every precaution will be taken to ensure Indigenous participants are not further disempowered during the research; and that I am an Indigenous researcher interested in contributing to research that produces decolonizing outcomes. According to Baskin (2005), Indigenous research is not worth doing if it does not focus on the goals and processes of decolonization and self-determination. Once this framework was in place, two qualitative approaches were added; IRM and grounded theory.

Indigenous research methods (IRM) were the chosen approach to build long-term, respectful relationships with Indigenous community partners, to privilege Indigenous voices, and to ensure that Indigenous knowledges remain privileged and prominent throughout. IRMs were also used to design the project, collect the data, involve community in the analysis of the data, and to present it back to Indigenous People in a culturally relevant way. Reflexivity and relationality are key in these processes.

The research data was gathered using predominantly Indigenous research methods, to collect Indigenous knowledge in story form. Storytelling is a valid form of Indigenous knowledge, as it includes responsibility on the part of the listener/researcher, incorporates both interpretation and analysis, has room for many explanations for the phenomena be-

ing researched, is a creative search for solutions, and is a political act of liberation and self-determination (Baskin, 2005).

Grounded theory is a qualitative research design in which the inquirer generates a general explanation (theory) of a process, an action, or an interaction shaped by the views of the participants (Creswell, 2013). This method was used to focus the research approach, to design the mechanics and movement of research activities, and to formulate research questions that induce responses that shed light on power as a process. The teachings of grounded theory helped communicate the research problem and the research purpose in a format that is well understood in Western academia.

To explain the meaning of Indigenous knowledges and epistemologies to a non-Indigenous audience, it is incumbent upon Indigenous researchers to bridge worldviews and to explain the process throughout academic writing (Wilson, 2008). Applying Western (grounded) theory, as a supplementary method, allowed for presentation of the data in a way that encourages cross-cultural understandings. The study argues that IRM are sufficient to determine an Indigenous epistemological worldview of power. However, Western thought has come to mediate the entire world to the point where worldviews that differ from the mainstream are relegated to the periphery (Hart, 2010). Although it is my position that IRMs produce valid data, I anticipate that Western-trained scientists who do not understand the utility of holistic thinking and/or who are not familiar with IRM, will encounter difficulty following Indigenous epistemological logic. Considering the risk that Western-trained scientists will disregard the importance of data generated using IRM alone, I decided to add grounded theory to conduct the familiar scientific process of reducing the holistic story down to smaller, indivisible components for the purpose of a complementary analysis. The results of the grounded theory analysis are presented in a format that is more recognizable, and acceptable, to Western science.

When undertaking research with Indigenous Peoples, it is absolutely crucial that relationships of honesty and trust are established, that the researcher(s) intentions are made known and are transparent, and that participants have all the support and information that they need to understand the research

and feel safe participating. Therefore, I must always practice reflexivity, or awareness of the place where I fit within the “two worlds” that this research navigates, and I must declare my awareness of it to every audience. Reflexivity in this context refers to the ongoing assessment of the influence of my background and ways of perceiving reality, experiences, ideological biases, and interest during the research (Chilisa, 2012, p. 168).

The research design allowed for Indigenous People to form research relationships with each other, as well as with our ideas. Utilizing reflexivity to remain accountable to all of my relations while conducting research is a movement toward the concept of relational knowledge, and a movement away from the Western idea that knowledge is an individual entity that can be gained and owned (Wilson, 2008). Instead, relational knowledge is freely shared and focuses on how all things are related and therefore relevant (Wilson, 2008).

The data analysis stage involved a mixture of IRMs and grounded theory. The first phase of data analysis involved processing the interviews, and then reading and re-reading transcripts, while making time to include ceremony, meditation, contemplation, and reflection. Later, using Creswell (2013) as a primary guide, the data was coded according to the grounded theory method of open coding, axial coding, and then selective coding. I decided to code the data manually because that method is the most intimate and helpful for developing a relationship with the information. The coding process indicated that the Indigenous epistemological understanding of power provided by the Indigenous participants would be made up of five themes that are related to each other.

Relationship

The methodology requires that respectful research relationships be built and maintained in an Indigenous community. To the great benefit of this research, Ogimaa Kwe Linda Debassige, Chief of M'Chigeeng First Nation, accepted the role of Indigenous community partner to this project early on, and we developed a shared vision for the implementation of the research plan into the community. To further ensure researcher accountability, Ogimaa Kwe Debassige also represented the community as a full member of the thesis

committee.

Ogimaa Kwe Debassige assisted with participant recruitment and her contributions were invaluable during the data collection phase. Decisions such as whom to recruit as key informants, as well as selecting research sites where the interviews occurred, were reached by using a purposeful sampling strategy (Creswell, 2013), wherein participants who can contribute to the development of an Indigenous theoretical view of power are purposefully sought out. Interviews were conducted during events and gatherings, and there were several one-on-one pre-arranged meetings as well. Snowball sampling was used occasionally during interviews that occurred at gatherings. For example, I recorded four interviews at the Wiikwemkoong Annual Cultural Festival. I carried folding chairs with me and set them up in comfortable spots off to the sides of the powwow to interview three participants, and I interviewed another participant in her kitchen closeby. I also interviewed three participants at the M'Chigeeng Annual Traditional Powwow in a similar manner. The audio recordings of those interviews include the heartbeat of the powwow drum in the background. Some of these participants had recommended other people they knew who could contribute to the study, and they helped us introduce the idea to these potential participants as well. The snowball effect was easy to achieve in these settings, and a total of seven out of 15 people were interviewed at these events using a combination of the two methods. The other interviews were pre-arranged with Indigenous People who were selected based on their experience with power, and sometimes other considerations. For example, Ogimaa Kwe Debassige and I had previously discussed which Elders I would recruit to answer the research question, and we achieved a desired balance in the ratio of two female Elders to two male Elders.

While designing the research question and sub-questions, I decided to stay away from asking the cause-and-effect questions, such as: "What are the causes of power?" Or "What are the effects of power?" However, those ideas were addressed, and are impossible to eliminate, while discussing power. Fortunately, grounded theory allows for the examination of processes using a variety of "how" or "what" questions. I can therefore focus on: "What is power from an Indigenous epistemological view?" Once the ques-

tion is converted into ordinary language, all that I am really asking is: "what is power" or "what does this concept 'power' mean to you?" Sometimes participants can talk at length and provide a full interview of their response, contributing data without being asked any further questions. Sometimes participants are not quite sure what I mean. Therefore, I developed an interview guide that asks for the answer to the main question, but also includes secondary questions that can prompt the participant to move their thinking into different areas and flesh out a more detailed response. The sub-questions, or prompts, include: (a) Who has power? (b) Do you have power? (c) Who does not have power? (d) How do power dynamics affect or influence you? (e) How does power work in our society? (f) What makes a person powerful? Every participant was asked to answer the main question, but the sub-questions were asked only if the prompts were found useful during the interview.

After preliminary data analysis, the community partner and I planned a knowledge sharing event that was named Eshkweziwin exhibit. The event was designed to allow for ceremony, a presentation of the data, and discussion, as well as presentations by the research participants. To properly honour and show gratitude to the community, we shared a feast before these presentations, and a giveaway occurred afterward.

The Eshkweziwin exhibit was important for maintaining good relationships in the process of analyzing the data. The event was designed to show the participants and the community the direction the research was taking and the outcomes that might result from the analysis of the data. It was an opportunity for the participants to see themselves in the themes that were extracted from the data, and to add their voices to the co-creation of relational knowledge. The Eshkweziwin event further shaped the epistemological view of power that emerged from this research, and it provided a time and place to practice relationality and accountability in the way that we research, and the way that we share what we learn with each other.

Results

Following Creswell (2013), I selected relationships as the single, central code to become the focus of the theory. The categories that emerged from the final

stage of the data analysis include sacred power sources, the abuse of power, Indigenous women, language, and knowledge, each of which are held together by the common prominent theme: relationships.

The project utilizes both worldviews to synthesize an Indigenous theoretical explanation of power and to deconstruct the data and represent it in a way that is more recognizable in Western academia. A combination of the grounded theory and IRM analysis resulted in the following paragraph:

Power is honouring all of Creation. Power is connectedness to Mother Earth and respect for her life systems. Power is caring for the Ancestors and using the knowledge and ceremonies they passed down. Power is Indigenous women who bring balance, carry the water, and give life. Power is our languages, our voices, our stories, and our songs. Power is the collective cognitive experience known as Indigenous knowledge, which is based on experience, language, and shared beliefs. Power is kinship, community, and good relationships. Power is remaining resilient, adapting to change, and ensuring that Indigenous knowledge survives the colonial assault (Hickey, 2019, p. 105).

These results were further condensed to answer the research question in the following statement: *There are many forms and manifestations of power that are related to each other. The source of power is in the interrelatedness of everyone to everything else that is known and unknown. Humility, harmony, and balanced relationships produce the healthiest and most magnificent manifestations of power.*

Limitations

The greatest limitation to a study that seeks to investigate the meaning of a phenomenon as complicated as power from more than one epistemological worldview, is the scope of the project. It is difficult to design a study that draws clear boundaries regarding what concepts will be included, and which will be set aside for future development. For example, there are many philosophical concepts that make up a worldview, such as ontology (model of being), axiology (theory of values), and praxeology (theory of action) (Vidal,

2012). For the purposes of this project, I have narrowed the focus to epistemology. Participants were asked the epistemological question “what is power?” The question invites the respondent to become aware of their worldview, and therefore the answer reflects not only aspects of their epistemology, but also aspects of their worldview.

Power is such a broad concept that the researcher must devise a way to narrow the focus. As expected, the boundaries of the study are too confined to present a comprehensive review of the voluminous literature on the subject. Therefore, the literature review is restricted to an overview of prominent theories of power, and epistemological comparisons are made using these theories and the data provided by the respondents. The selection of Western theories is curated to demonstrate how the debate has evolved prior to colonization of the Americas, and after.

An examination of power always brings to the surface many related concepts, which have their own clusters of sub-concepts, such as leadership, authority, agency, legitimacy, and sovereignty, to name only a few. It would take a lifetime to address every aspect of the phenomenon of power; therefore, concepts selected for deeper analysis are restricted to prominent themes that emerged from the data.

The limited scope of the project successfully produced an Indigenous epistemological statement of the meaning of power as a phenomenon from the perspective of fifteen Indigenous participants. The study paves the way for Indigenous scholarship to springboard to a larger study, with a larger sample and more complicated methodology, toward the goal of developing a theory of power that will stand on equal footing to the other major theories.

Discussion

Now that we have an Indigenous epistemological statement about power, it is time to discuss how it fits into the larger conversation about power. The theories of power presented at the beginning of the article remind us about what is well known about Western theories of power. They teach us the theory behind force/coercive power, which remains the chosen weapon of normalized oppression to this day. Furthermore, from the Western worldview, Indigenous epistemologies appear to have less merit, scientifically speak-

ing, when compared to mainstream academia. It has been difficult to convince academics that Indigenous knowledge is valid, and worthy of the academy's acceptance as such. The key to creating balanced relationships requires that Indigenous epistemologies be integrated through all academic disciplines.

Two important differences stand out between Western and Indigenous epistemologies of power. These are the source of power, and our intentions for the use of power. What are the outcomes we wish to achieve by utilizing power? In Western epistemology, the source of power has mainly been by virtue, by right, or by legitimacy. Western societies have allowed people to accumulate disproportionately high levels of power over others because it is considered either virtuous, righteous, or legitimate. In Indigenous societies, the source of power is the sacred network of interconnectedness of all elements of the universe, swirling around in a dance of perpetual change and transformation — or the flux.

The goal that Western societies seek to achieve with power is the production and maintenance of relatively orderly societies, based on individualism and competition, and wherein great discrepancies in wealth and power distribution are a normal feature of the capitalist model. Indigenous People do not claim that any one person is more entitled to hold a disproportionately high amount of power over any other person or creature of Earth, because imbalances cause ill health in communities and in ecosystems. The data shows us that unbalanced power relationships are antithetical to Indigenous epistemological views about being part of a healthy network. The goal that Indigenous societies seek to achieve with power, is to live harmoniously within the delicate balance of forces that constitute the flux that is our lived experiences in Indigenous spaces.

Another key difference that stands out from this research, is that Western epistemologies of power focus on what is superior and what is inferior, whereas Indigenous epistemologies are not concerned with making judgements about the value of one over the other. According to Indigenous epistemologies, all of creation is sacred. Previous critiques of the Western worldview have resulted in the common use of the term, Eurocentrism, which is defined as an “imaginative and institutional context that informs contemporary scholarship, opinion and law” (Battiste &

Henderson, 2000, p. 21). “As a theory, it postulates the superiority of Europeans over non-Europeans. It is built on a set of assumptions and beliefs that educated an usually unprejudiced Europeans and North Americans habitually accept as true, as supported by the facts, or as reality” (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 21). Indigenous epistemologies present a challenge to the “truths” produced by Eurocentric logic, and Indigenous scholars present a challenge to the fundamental pillars of Eurocentrism: the obsession with objectivity and individualism.

Vine Deloria (2003) was the first to create a space within Western academia where we could look at power as it exists outside of the Western preoccupation with objectivity. “In Western thought scientific theories of reality, knowledge, and methods for knowing are logically consistent. The problem is that they constrain, even preclude, any discussion of our human experience and life as a part of processes involving power(s), which are irreducible to discrete objects or things” (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001, p. 15). The Indigenous participants of this project accessed their Indigenous lived experience and described their life as part of these processes, and the Indigenous epistemological statement about power is derived from that space, where Indigenous knowledges reside.

Alfred articulates that in Indigenous philosophies, power flows from respect for nature and the natural order (Alfred, 2009). “To hold power, it is necessary to gain knowledge through life experience and directed learning from Elders” (Alfred, 2009, p. 75). These philosophies are missing from the mainstream understanding of power, which is reflected in the imbalances we see throughout contemporary society. Modern society does not give the proper reverence for the existence of power in all the elements that make up the universe. Indigenous philosophies teach us to respect and accommodate that power in all its varied forms (Alfred, 2009).

Indigenous Knowledge and Indigenous languages were prominently discussed by participants, and were identified as having thematic significance. Indigenous worldviews are empirical relationships with local ecosystems, and Indigenous languages are an expression of these relationships (Henderson, 2000). Indigenous languages express an awareness of a local ecology and are directed to understanding both external life forms and the invisible forces beneath

them (Henderson, 2000).

As indicated, relationships are especially relevant to the study of power. Indigenous Knowledge is specific to certain ecosystems and to the relationships that create those ecosystems. Therefore, Indigenous ways of knowing, or Indigenous epistemologies, have ethical and moral dimensions, and are tied to places, to ecologies, and to life systems (Baskin, 2016). Unlike European languages, the purpose of Indigenous languages is for maintaining positive relationships.

Unlike most Europeans, (Algonquian peoples) do not have a noun-oriented language that creates divisions or dualities. Their pursuit is to be with the flux, to experience its changing form, to develop a relationship with the forces, and thus to create harmony. Their language and thought are an attempt to learn from being part of the flux, to create a complementary and harmonious relation with nature, to experience the beauty of the moment, and to release such inspirations back to where they came from without fear or loss. Their language has not developed a method to explain the forces or change them, merely to contain them. This is the vital context of their worldview and life. Because of the awareness of flux and its forces, the Algonquian language is an active relationship between the elements of a particular environment (Henderson, 2000, p. 262).

As Henderson articulates, Indigenous languages were not developed to explain, describe, label, or measure the forces of the universe; they are designed to support and honour the life-giving and life-sustaining forces of the universe (Henderson, 2000). According to Battiste & Henderson (2000), Indigenous knowledge is the expression of the vibrant relationships between people, their ecosystems, and the other living beings and spirits that share the lands.

In Canada, the truth and reconciliation process requires us to re-examine and make a sincere effort to understand what truth is from both epistemological viewpoints (The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). However, the new era of reconciliation is perplexing for everyone. Canada has not officially described the meaning of the concept as it pertains to relations with Indigenous

Peoples. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) provides the following definition: “reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. In order for that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, an acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour” (The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 6).

Indigenous scholars and activists are critical toward reconciliation, indicating that decolonization of Canada is required first, including a massive transfer of land, power, and wealth back to Indigenous Peoples (Alfred, 2017; Palmater, 2017). “Reconciliation is recolonization because it is allowing the colonizer to hold on to his attitudes and mentality and does not challenge his behaviour towards our people or the land” (Alfred, 2017, p. 11). To change the attitudes and mentality of the colonizer, and to encourage understanding amongst Indigenous Peoples about how individuals of settler ancestry become convinced of their own superiority in the first place, I advocate for an epistemological shift in thinking.

I believe that reconciliation is about the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and persons of settler ancestry, and I believe that the relationship is worth the effort. However, I also believe that reconciliation requires understanding of each other’s epistemological worldviews, and this understanding is almost completely inadequate. We can not claim to be in the infancy stages of reconciliation since we are still conceiving the meaning of it. I believe that newer generations of Canadians, armed with access to the truth, will decide to engage in this process because it is the right thing to do. I believe that the cross-cultural epistemological understandings articulated in the study will help us co-develop a pathway to reconciliation.

Conclusions

The Indigenous epistemological statement produced by this research is an original contribution to the conversation about power. The value of this data is demonstrated by its applicability to the issue of problematic relations between the Indigenous population and the settler population. It has further value by the

way it uncovers the friction that occurs when Western and Indigenous worldviews collide. Within the parameters of the thesis, the theoretical basis for an Indigenous theory of power was established. I believe that the development of an Indigenous theory of power is worth more study, as is the applicability of philosophy and epistemology to reconciliation and healing.

From the totality of the research I conclude a more balanced distribution of power resources will be required to achieve reconciliation. Indigenous epistemologies explain the reasons that we must do this work, and they provide the tools to get it done. Indigenous communities must continue their work restoring Indigenous worldviews and languages, and non-Indigenous communities must create space for Indigenous epistemologies, while we work together to solve our common challenges.

As has been discussed, Indigenous People understand the force power that has disrupted the trajectory of Indigenous lives on this continent and around the world. However, the data of this research shows that Indigenous People continue to practice the rich theory and philosophy behind traditional ways of living and of being Indigenous, which has everything to do with power, and nothing to do with force. It is the reason that Indigenous People have survived the colonial experience up until now. Indigenous People understand that our power is in the community, and we work together toward community-oriented goals. Theory of power is not always about force – and this is an important point – because it is a point of entry to a new understanding of power.

Canadians and Indigenous People must work together toward truth and reconciliation. The goal is peaceful and ethical coexistence. However, this requires that ongoing colonial violence be addressed. It requires that we place the “truths” of Western epistemology on the same shelf as the “truths” of Indigenous epistemology and respect their value equally. Indigenous People are not asking for a dramatic switch from Western methods to Indigenous methods. Instead, we need willingness from the settler population to allow for Indigenous ways of knowing to share the same space as Western ways of knowing. This will only grow our collective pool of resources from which we can draw solutions to our challenges.

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