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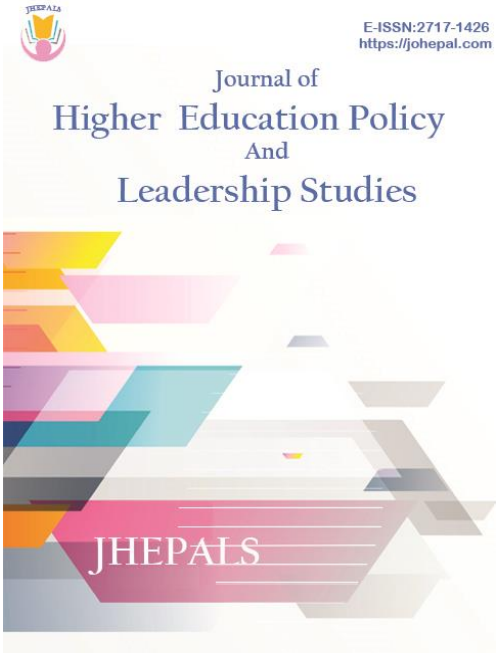

Praxis-Poiesis: University–Community Relationship in an Epoch of Uncertainty and Disruption

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Abstract

This paper presents findings from a critical ethnographic study that spanned 3 years from 2018 to 2021 in a Canadian post-secondary context and engaged transdisciplinary quantum feminisms as a conceptual framework. The purpose of the study was to formulate an ethical frame of reference that could facilitate exchanges within university–community partnerships. This study was ongoing as the global COVID-19 pandemic unfolded, a time frame that also paralleled heightened social and political awareness of racial disparity in Canada, the United States, and around the globe. These factors prompted the authors to expand the scope of the project midway to also consider the impact of COVID-19 on university–community partnerships. Given this, a main research question guides this study: What qualifies university–community partnerships as ethical? It is contextualized by a secondary question: What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on university–community partnerships? Findings from this study led to the development of an ethical frame of reference for university–community partnerships entitled Praxis-Poiesis: Intentional Allyship, Reciprocal Relationships, and Transilience.

Keywords: University–Community Partnerships; Ethics; Transdisciplinarity; Quantum Feminisms; COVID-19 Pandemic

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Introduction

Building upon previous investigations exploring the links among transdisciplinarity, complexity theory, and post-secondary educational reform (Moore, 2018; Mitchell & Moore, 2015a, 2015b), this critical ethnographic study investigates university–community partnerships through a conceptual framework that integrates transdisciplinary social justice (Moore, 2006, 2018) and quantum feminism as read through Karen Barad's (2014) posthumanist performativity, relational ontology, and new temporality (Barad, 2007).This project spanned 3 years, from 2018 to 2021. It integrates consideration what Nkomo (2020) describes as twin viruses (or twin challenges), transforming this epoch of uncertainty, disruption, and discontinuity: the COVID-19 global pandemic and racial disparity.

The aim of this study is to formulate an ethical frame of reference that could facilitate exchanges among privileged speakers (university stakeholders) and community-based players, and in which praxis-poiesis encourages collaborative communications, new possibilities, safer spaces, and practices of accountability. In this way, ethics becomes centred on accountability, relational care, and acknowledgment of entangled (inseparable and interconnected) identities of difference. In other words, how might university–community partnerships engage in "talking up", "talking back", airing multiple voices, and "being with" subjects of varying power relations in service to social justice (see Griffiths, 2017, for a full discussion; see also hooks, 2015; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Probyn & Evers, 2010). This research addresses a gap in current literature by focusing on university–community partnerships (Baum, 2000; Wortham-Galvin et al., 2017) through an engagement with transdisciplinary social justice, complexity theory, and concern for voice and privilege in ethical praxis.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to formulate an ethical frame of reference that could facilitate exchanges within university–community partnerships. The study was ongoing as the global COVID-19 pandemic unfolded, which prompted the authors to expand the scope of the project midway to also consider the impact of COVID-19 on university–community partnerships. Given this, a main research question guides this study and is contextualized by a secondary question:

- What qualifies university–community partnerships as ethical?
- What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on university–community partnerships?

In this article, the en dash in the phrase "university–community" indicates more than just a conjunction of elements: rather, it is an intentional reflection of entanglement, intra-action, and inseparability of matter and meaning as this project is read through Barad's (2007) posthumanist performativity. As such, this study regards an ethical turn acknowledging the inseparability of university from community and the seamless bonds connecting theory, practice, and creativity within generative knowledge systems as praxis-poiesis. In this context, the conceptual framework of transdisciplinary social justice and quantum feminism engaged both application and reflection of theory to real world practice

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(praxis) to manifest a new conceptual frame of reference (poiesis) for university–community partnerships.

Social Location and Epistemic Subjectivity

As Canadian scholars, writing from positions in a medium sized comprehensive university, both authors are acutely aware of their privilege as educators and researchers from settler heritage working in a colonized country shaped by the cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples. A commitment to learn through settler ethics (Kouri, 2020) motivates this discussion of social location, recognition of relational responsibility, and the impact of the intra-action of our multiple identities on data collection, analysis, and epistemic subjectivity (Doucet, 2018). In this brief naming of our social location, we strive to reinforce a commitment to epistemologies that are congruent with a search for an ethical frame of reference tethered by relationality, accountability, and feminist ontology. Taking responsibility for the relations of power that shape our personal and scholarly intra-actions contributes to an ethical turn as we strive to realize a social justice agenda.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this project integrates transdisciplinarity with quantum feminisms. Transdisciplinarity denotes knowledge synthesis that reaches beyond individual disciplines and the academy towards a unified field; it is inquiry-driven, solution-focused, and process-oriented (Leavy, 2011; Moore, 2018; Nicolescu, 2010). After several centuries of disciplines articulating the boundaries of knowledge generation, transdisciplinarity is part of a radical wave of change in ways of knowing that has emerged since the quantum revolution, through which ideas from unified field theory are emphasized alongside the connections among disciplines (Nicolescu, 2007). Transdisciplinarity has established itself as a global education reform movement (Mitchell & Moore, 2008) grounded in an appreciation of complexity thinking, multiple levels of reality, and the logic of the included middle (Nicolescu, 2010). In other words, transdisciplinarity draws on knowledge forms that transcend essentialist categorization, Cartesian binaries, and Newtonian logic (Moore, 2018). A transdisciplinary worldview is symbiotic with quantum feminisms and with questioning of the separateness within lifeworlds. Engaging a conceptual framework of transdisciplinary quantum feminism is an ethical turn away from the search for distinctions among matter and meanings towards recognition of system are interconnected (and intra-connected from a quantum perspective).

Emergence of Transdisciplinary Discourses

A turning point was reached during the 1970s, creating space for discourses of transdisciplinarity to emerge in parallel with movements that juxtaposed critiques of higher education and student protests with aspirational goals for higher education that associated thinking globally and beyond with the first human spaceflight missions to the moon (for a detailed discussion see Bernstein, 2015). The initial use of the term “transdisciplinary” is most often attributed to seminars focused on interdisciplinarity that took place in the 1970s at the University of Nice, and specifically to papers delivered by three scholars from diverse disciplinary perspectives: Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, Austrian astrophysicist Erich Jantsch, and French sociologist Edgar Morin (Moore & Mitchell, 2015). At the time of these

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seminars, but independent of them, an American doctoral student in behavioural sciences named Jack Lee Mahan (1970) completed a dissertation focused upon transdisciplinarity. In the 1990s, reengagement with the term "transdisciplinary" provided new momentum after a period of dormancy. This coincided with growing awareness of the global climate crisis and the urgency of a collective response. Traditionally strict boundaries among disciplines were traded for liminal spaces where scholars and activists took forward creative solution-focused approaches to developing a synthesized field of knowledge to address problems of global concern (Moore, in press).

Transdisciplinarity holds the potential for knowledge synthesized towards a unified field that emerges from within and beyond the academy (Moore, 2018). This sense of potential in transdisciplinary praxis is process orientated and holds the quality of entelechy (Mitchell & Moore, 2015a, 2015b). The orientation of transdisciplinary praxis is towards social justice (Pratt-Clarke, 2012). As Augsburg (2014) suggested, "Transdisciplinarity presupposes an individual ethics, a desire to improve society and to contribute to the advancement of the common good" (p. 233). Through transdisciplinary knowledge work we understand the world to be a complex adaptive system.

The prefix trans means to go beyond, and transdisciplinary praxis unfolds rhizomatically as a complex systematic change process (Moore et al., 2005). This reflects a lateralization of communication and relationships that contrast hierarchies and categorizations typically found in academia and colonial systems of control. Transdisciplinary knowledge work equates the value of land-based, place-based, and practice knowledge with that found in the academy. Further, transdisciplinary social justice invites knowledge workers to engage as an ally with equity-seeking communities while "talking up" (Moreton-Robinson, 2000), "talking back" (hooks, 1989), and "being with" (Probyn & Evers, 2010) multiple voices. Transdisciplinary approaches to education and the social and natural sciences are fundamentally associated with critique and change (Somerville & Rapport, 2002).

The forerunners to transdisciplinarity include multidisciplinary, cross-disciplinary, and interdisciplinary perspectives. Choi and Pak (2006) addressed the conflation of these terms, which parallels the promotion of team-based research from funding agencies in health sciences and elsewhere. These scholars used metaphor to illustrate their explication of these terms (pp. 355–360):

> Multidisciplinary: Team members from different disciplines work independently on different aspects of the project with independent goals while maintaining distinct disciplinary and professional roles and methodologies. This is graphically analogous to two separate circles; mathematically, we can refer to the equation 2 + 2 = 4; metaphorically, we can think of a bowl of salad in which the ingredients are clearly distinguishable yet the whole also has a distinct identity.
>
> Interdisciplinary: Team members focus on the reciprocal action of disciplines and shared goals. Maintaining a discipline base, participants surrender some aspects of their disciplinary roles, which blurs disciplinary boundaries. The outcome is more than the sum of the parts: it is integrative. This is graphically analogous to the partial overlapping of two circles; mathematically, we can refer to the

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> equation 2 + 2 = 5; metaphorically, to a pot of stew in which ingredients work in combination but may still be distinguished.
>
> Transdisciplinary: Team members include relevant specialists, non-specialist stakeholders, and other participants who work together using a shared conceptual framework. Participants experience role release and role expansion as disciplinary boundaries are transcended. It is holistic, and graphically analogous to a third circle that covers two partially overlapping circles; mathematically, we can refer to the equation 2 + 2 = yellow; metaphorically, to a cake in which the ingredients are no longer distinguishable.

Transdisciplinarity propels stakeholders, as in a leap, into a unified, previously unknown, field of knowledge. Transdisciplinarity seeks cooperative partnerships to untangle complex problems that are not well suited to linear reasoning. Congruent with holistic ways of knowing, transdisciplinarity aligns with Indigenous knowledge systems and resistance to disciplinary boundaries that reinforce the commodification of knowledge (Mitchell & Moore, 2015a; Moore et al., 2005). Knowledge understood from the standpoint of holism (Clarysse & Moore, 2019 reinforces the interrelations and intra-dependency of all life, matter, and meaning as posthumanist performativity and intra-activity (Barad, 2007).

Transdisciplinary and Quantum Feminisms

Worldviews shape how we ask and answer questions: they orient us to our lifeworlds. For three centuries, enlightenment ideals have dominated Western worldviews, promoting dualistic categorizations and materialist conceptions such as mind and matter, object and subject, cause and effect, humankind and nature. These conceptions were mechanistic (Newton), materialist (Descartes), or hierarchical and competitive (Darwin). They led to rankings of race and gender that are anthropomorphic (Haverkort & Reijntjes, 2007) and male-centric, and that fuel white supremacy as well as colonization. Transdisciplinarity is built upon a set of axioms that challenges these basic building blocks, which are foundational to conventional Western worldviews. Postmodern, post-structuralist, and posthumanist perspectives have accelerated the work of challenging taken-for-granted knowledge; transdisciplinarity furthers this project by positioning knowledge workers to reach beyond integrating disciplinary perspectives toward complex systemic solutions to global problems (Moore, in press).

Nicolescu (2007), a theoretical physicist, described a taxonomy of axioms of transdisciplinary research, tethering the concept to a set of philosophical principles that reflects non-linear complex systems and quantum mechanics:

> The ontological axiom: In Nature and in our knowledge of Nature, there are different levels of Reality and, correspondingly, different levels of perception.
>
> The logical axiom: The passage from one level of Reality to another is insured by the logic of the included middle.
>
> The complexity axiom: The structure of the totality of levels of Reality or perception is a complex structure: every level is what it is because all the levels exist at the same time. (p. 146)

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Praxis-Poiesis

The ontological axiom is an approach to reality that is non-hierarchical, boasts no fundamental level, yet is unified and coherent. Transdisciplinarity resists rigid distinctions between subjects in the same manner that it dissolves rigid disciplinary boundaries. It projects an understanding of discontinuity within/as the structure and levels of reality — a discontinuity evident in the quantum world. Such a quantum space-time construction indicates that the structure of reality has more than four dimensions (i.e., three of space and one of time). In fact, according to particle physics, 10 dimensions of space and one dimension of time may be traced through superstring theory (Nicolescu, 2007, p. 153).

According to Nicolescu (2007), transdisciplinary reality has a trans-subjective dimension, being more than a "social construction, the consensus of collectivity, or some intersubjective agreement" (p. 147). This points to the coexistence of complex plurality and unity for which "no level of Reality constitutes a privileged place from which one is able to understand all the other levels of Reality" (p. 147). Each level of reality is incomplete on its own; the various levels are connected through a zone of non-resistance. Nicolescu (2007) argued that the included middle, or zone of non-resistance:

> restores the continuity broken by levels of Reality and levels of perception. The unity of levels of Reality and its complementary zone of non-resistance constitutes what we call the transdisciplinary object … the unity of levels of perception and this complementary zone of non-resistance constitutes what we call the transdisciplinary subject …. It follows that the zone of non-resistance plays the role of third party between subject and object … the included middle … unifying the transdisciplinary subject and object. (p. 146)

In other words, "knowledge is neither exterior nor interior: it is simultaneously exterior and interior" to the inquirer (Nicolescu, 2007, p. 146).

It follows that the logical axiom of transdisciplinarity is an abandonment of classical logic for the logic of the included middle. The included middle is a move away from dualism, away from mutually exclusive pairings existing in a single level of reality wherein patterns of opposition are maintained. The logic of the included middle is a tool for integration and transformation, a "living reality that touches all the dimensions of our being" (Nicolescu, 2007, p. 152). This is not to say that classical logic is without usefulness; instead, it is important to understand that classical logic's utility is found in a range of contexts such as hostile environments where survival calls for a simple analysis of external reality in binary pairings. The suggestion here is that the included middle is an extension of classical logic in which space is created for "ethical, mythological and metaphysical representations" and which calls for the erasure of "contradictories" in favour of holism rather than reductionism (Nicolescu, 2007, p. 153).

The complexity axiom is a reflection of the principle of interdependence. The complexity axiom reflects the universal interdependence of all levels of reality and perception, bound by the included middle or hidden third (Nicolescu, 2007, p. 154). The space of complexity is a kind of crucible that retains both unity and diversity (Montuori, 2013), "where that which appears to be disunited is in fact united, and that which appears contradictory is perceived as non-contradictory" (Nicolescu, 2007, p. 151). This interaction brings the inquirer into the centre of the inquiry (Montuori, 2013). The characteristic of transcendence in transdisciplinarity is that of the subject and the notion of beyond

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disciplines (trans-disciplinarity) signifies that this interaction involves subject, hidden third, and object (Nicolescu, 2007, 2010).

Similar to the emphasis on the hidden third in transdisciplinary ways of knowing, quantum feminisms illuminate subjectivities in new ways through entangled processes that reflect a unity among space, time, and matter (Barad, 2007). Quantum feminisms are grounded in practice-based conceptualizations that entwine matter and meaning instead of bifurcating theory and practice (Marshall & Alberti, 2014). Barad achieves this by queering quantum theory through a consideration of "the possibility that the relational ontology of quantum physics might yield a different set of insights worth considering for human and non-human worlds" (as cited in Juelskjaer, 2013, p. 755). In this way, quantum feminisms offer a new wave of knowing, being, and acting through cycles of diffraction and entanglements that make possible new temporalities and new diffraction patterns (Barad, 2014). To illustrate this point, we can return to Choi and Pak's (2006) analogy of transdisciplinarity: the equation 2 + 2 = yellow, and the metaphor of a cake (knowledge creation that is something wholly new, synthesized from individual components), and then bring forward quantum feminisms (Stark, 2017) by tossing that cake into the compost bin to create new organic matter to nurture growth and continue the organic (rhizomatic) cycle. In this way quantum feminisms provide a groundwork for realizing transdisciplinary methodology. Barad (2014) describes such a reimagining of the intra-connection of matter and of meaning by referring to the work of an earthworm making compost, an organic metaphor that illustrates the notion of the inseparability of matter, meaning, process, and outcome. These quantum conceptualizations are driven by a view of connectivity as a non-centralized and iterative process that bridges posthumanism and new materialisms (Ringrose et al., 2019).

Transdisciplinarity is intentional in its reach outside of expert silos that house the dominant structures that protect disciplinary distinctions (Moore, 2018) and privileged speakers (Griffiths, 2017; Spivak, 2010). This worldview facilitates processes that decolonize relationships, communication, and knowledge sharing. The emphasis is on from "the ground up" inductive knowledge from non-privileged speakers as much as on deductive processes of analysis from positions of privilege (Griffiths, 2017). This lateralization of communication is analogous to the "lazy eight" model (lemniscate, or infinity loop) of ecosystems, human communication (Röling, 2007), and radical listening (Moore, 2018), which reflects cyclical ebbs and flows of knowledge creation that are rhizomatic rather than hierarchical or linear.

Transdisciplinary quantum feminisms provide tools to transcend classical logic and the tired models of power and control emblematic of a colonial ethos. Transdisciplinary quantum feminisms describe a state of becoming within an infinite flow of matter, practice, and discourse. The principles of transdisciplinary quantum feminisms mirror the millennia-old concept of holism (Morcom, 2017), of interconnection and intraconnection, articulated through Indigenous epistemologies in Canada and beyond (Clarysse & Moore, 2019; Moore & Duffin, 2020; Moore et al., 2005). Knowledge is a crystallization of time, space, matter, and meaning.

University–Community Partnerships, Ethics, and Twin Viruses

Critiques of higher education as socially detached and academically irrelevant (Strier, 2011), in tandem with efforts to legitimize financial investments in the institution of universities

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(Groulx et al., 2020), have led to calls for more sustainable relationships between universities and communities in order to tackle complex problems (Groulx et al., 2020). Moreover, a recognition has taken hold over the past two decades that the boundaries between university and community are permeable and represent essential exchanges among place-based knowledge-holders and academic researchers. These viewpoints have led to transdisciplinary partnerships that engage public pedagogy (Sandlin et al., 2011) as co-learning, or a synthesis of informal and formal ways of knowing: "Done authentically, public pedagogy should invert the roles of intellectual and public, altering the source of knowledge creation and making it both communal and multidirectional" (Groulx et al., 2020, p. 277).

It is important to recall that, within these university community partnerships, "We are all positioned differently across a diverse range of communities", and that, in parallel to these engagements, "co-education, dialogue, and relationality, as well as tension and inequity" can reinforce "injustices and exclusions" (Luhmann et al., 2019, p. 18). If co-learning partnerships are to reflect a transdisciplinary social justice agenda, critical consciousness of these social and power relations must guide praxis towards seeking participation from equity-seeking communities and allies, and this must become a central feature of rethinking traditional power relations amongst the academy, the community, and the government. This ethos of reciprocity, experimentation, and openness to radical novelty resists traditional knowledge hierarchies in exchange for equalization of access to knowledge production (Groulx et al., 2020).

Congruent with principles of co-learning and public pedagogy, feminist epistemologists, methodologists, and ethicists have challenged the neutrality of research and of researchers by emphasizing the dynamics of knowledge, power, and voice. Epistemic responsibility and situated knowledge are pillars of feminist ethics (Doucet, 2018), and have laid the groundwork for epistemic decolonization (Smith, 2012). Seen through this lens, feminist ethics emphasizes reflexivity, critical consciousness of the process of constructing knowledge, and attention to the voice of dissemination (Doucet, 2018). It is understood that different epistemic practices bring forward "different knowledges, realities, social worlds and effects" (Doucet, 2018, p. 79). Barad (2007) termed this an "ethico-onto-epistemology". Knowledge is at the same time situated, relational, and political.

In Canada, university–community partnerships exist within the larger context of settler colonialism, cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples, and the white supremacy that speaks through legislation, policy, and practice within social services, education, health, and justice. Structural racism still influences Canada's post-war welfare state (Moore & Duffin, 2020). Evidence of discrimination against Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC) across service-delivery systems includes the overrepresentation of Indigenous and Black young people and adults in justice and welfare systems (Blackstock, 2007). The roots of this structural racism were detailed in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015a, 2015b) reports on the impact of 500 years of colonial history, including a century of residential school systems (1880s–1990s).

In May 2021, the discovery of the remains of 215 children, some as young as 3 years old, at the site of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School in Canada (Dickson & Watson, 2021) added to a sinister history that has been extensively documented in the

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Canada Truth and Reconciliation Commission reports (2015a, 2015b) and is readily available to the public. More than in the past, however, Canadians have expressed outrage as this news entered everyday discourse in Canadian homes and around the globe (Austen & Bilefsky, 2021). The public reckoning of Canada's colonial history gained new momentum. This breakthrough in public consciousness seems linked to the sense of uncertainty, disruption, and discontinuity fueled by the twin forces transforming the present epoch: the COVID-19 global pandemic and racial disparity. Globally, as Nkomo (2020) suggested, we stand at a critical juncture:

> As if it was not enough that the Coronavirus exposed racial disparities in infection rates and deaths, we received another reminder of the ever-present realities of racism. The graphic videotaped murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, sparked protests across the United States. In addition to the global support of these protests, we saw outcries against the racism existing in other nations, reminding us of its pandemic quality. Their confluence can either claim more victims without social justice and equality or be the wake-up call that shatters the delusion that race does not determine access to all the rights and resources human beings need…. (p. 811)

Like the COVID-19 pandemic, racism is virulent, persistent, and systematic (Nkomo, 2020). Considering university–community partnerships, and a turn towards a new futurity, any lasting change will demand a courageous assessment of the theories and practices that guide how we act, think, and navigate our lifeworlds.

Research Methodology

This critical ethnography spanned from 2018 to 2021 and included data collection and analysis both prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus of the study was a medium-sized university campus in Southern Ontario, Canada. This geographic location is covered by the Upper Canada Treaties and is within the land protected by the Dish with One Spoon Wampum agreement.

The study aimed to formulate an ethical frame of reference that could facilitate exchanges within university–community partnerships. The research was ongoing as the pandemic unfolded, which prompted the authors to expand the scope of the project midway to also consider the impact of COVID-19 on university–community partnerships. In this instance, "ethical" denotes accountability to a social justice orientation and a critical appreciation of structure, process, and social power relations. Multiple data-collection strategies were utilized in the study, including 10 in-depth semi-structured interviews ranging from 30 to 90 minutes, content analysis of policy reports and media communications, archival research, critical literature reviews, and field notes made during emic participation and etic observations. Appreciating that participants often had multiple roles within university and community contexts, the study sought out key stakeholders:

- University: academic administrators, faculty, and staff focused on facilitating experiential education and participatory research.
- Community: activists and advocates involved in long-standing as well as newly emerging university–community partnerships.

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Sampling techniques for solicited interviews included purposive (Robinson, 2014) and snowball (Noy, 2008) processes for identifying key stakeholders. The project also sought the views of individuals identifying as, and allies identifying with, Indigenous, Black, BIPOC, anti-ableist, and LGBTQ2+ communities.

The choice to engage critical ethnography as our philosophy of method provided a platform to critically reflect the notion of university–community and aspects of culture, communication, and relations of power (Carspecken, 1996; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Mitchell & Moore, 2015a, 2015b). As Carspecken (1996) argued, for critical researchers:

> Much of our research attempts to clarify how and where oppression works. This is not a straight forward matter, since the identities, the forms of thinking, and the beliefs of people are all ensnared within oppressive relations. We need a rigorous epistemology to pursue our subtle investigations … it is rigorous epistemology that is definitive for critical methodology. (p. 8)

Epistemologically, this project emphasized a complex theoretical orientation to culture and community that acknowledges contested, fluid, and rhizomatic qualities that are more likely heterogeneous than homogeneous:

> There is an intimate relationship between the world we perceive, and the conceptual categories encoded in the language we speak. We don't perceive a purely objective world out there, but one subliminally pre-partitioned and pre-interpreted according to culture-bound categories. (Kastrup, 2018, p. i)

Exploring the nexus of university–community partnerships through the lens of transdisciplinarity, social justice, and quantum feminism positions this research to make contributions that cross a range of discourses and disciplines.

Findings

The following discussion of findings integrates data from the multiple data collection strategies described in the Methodology section.

Overview: Canadian Universities with University–Community Partnerships

There are approximately 100 universities across Canada. In Ontario, Canada's most densely populated province, there are 24 colleges and 22 universities at the time of this publication. The majority of these post-secondary institutions have an office of community engagement, each with its own unique vision, mission, and terms of reference statement, but all are primarily focused on building partnerships, services, and ties with the broader community. Across Canada, from east coast to west coast, post-secondary institutions have articulated goals of community engagement ranging from Dalhousie University's (Nova Scotia) aim to provide "opportunities for students to work with municipal, provincial and federal governments, businesses, and the not-for-profit sector" (Dalhousie University, n.d., para. 1), to the University of Manitoba's (Manitoba) "mission … to increase and support experiential and community engaged learning opportunities for students to learn from and with communities and support community-led-projects within the University (University of Manitoba, n.d., para. 1) to the University of Calgary's (Alberta) objective "to play a leading role in the evolution of our city and our province by providing exceptional learning

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opportunities, conducting cutting-edge research, creating an environment of inclusion, and serving our communities selflessly" (University of Calgary, 2021, para. 4), and Université Laval's (Quebec) assertion that "society and community engagement will underpin all experiences at Université Laval" (Université Laval, n.d., para. 1). In other words, community–university engagement initiatives benefit communities while enhancing student learning.

Several post-secondary institutions across Canada acknowledge specific goals of working with Indigenous students and in partnership with Indigenous communities. Writing in the Canadian news magazine Maclean's regarding the response to the December 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Calls to Action, Sarah Treleaven (2018) observed, "Many universities have embraced these calls with gusto, accepting them as an urgent and overdue reckoning. Institutions have focused on recruiting and retaining more Indigenous students, hiring Indigenous faculty and creating Indigenous spaces" (para. 6). Importantly, Canada's sole First Nations-owned university, the First Nations University of Canada (located in Saskatchewan), "aspires to have a transformative impact by bridging our ceremonies, knowledge keepers, languages, and traditions with the delivery of high-quality education that will lead to the pride and success of all students, First Nations communities, and Canada" (First Nations University of Canada, 2021, para. 1). Likewise, Algoma University in Ontario (located in the former Shingwauk Residential School building since 1971) declared: "As part of the transformational efforts we are undertaking to move the Nation's priority of healing and reconciliation forward, we will use our history and stories to teach the truth about the residential schools history in Canada while at the same time, moving forward with Chief Shingwauk's original vision for education on this site to be one of cross-cultural learning and teaching" (Algoma University, 2021, para. 2). The University of Manitoba (Manitoba), in describing their "Working in Good Ways" project, stated:

> Given our team's focus on Indigenous community engagement, we were aware of the harms that community engaged learning practitioners and students cause Indigenous communities when they approach them with a settler colonial mind-set. This project is an effort to reduce these potential harms within our field of practice. (University of Manitoba, n.d., para. 2)

The University of Victoria's (British Columbia) Office of Indigenous Academic and Community Engagement (IACE) "offers programs and events to build community on campus and connections between campus and communities" (University of Victoria, n.d., para. 1). The University of Winnipeg's (Manitoba) Office of Indigenous Engagement's Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre "is a bridge between the University of Winnipeg and the Indigenous and inner-city communities. The Centre is a partnership that provides educational and capacity-building opportunities rooted in Indigenous language and culture for children, youth and families" (University of Winnipeg, n.d., para. 1). Mount Allison University in New Brunswick developed "a new partnership agreement between Mount Allison University and Three Nations Education Group Inc. (TNEGI) [that] will seek to enrich and transform educational opportunities and learning for First Nations students in New Brunswick and beyond" (Mount Allison University, 2020, para. 1); further, "the Institute's mandate, in part, seeks to answer the Calls to Action, as set out by Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 2015 report" (Mount Allison University, 2020, para. 5). Adopting the TRC Calls to Action is an emergent and significant factor in establishing and

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maintaining university–community partnerships for several academic institutions in an effort to decolonize the academy.

Throughout the province of Ontario, several universities have established community engagement offices with clearly stated goals accessible online to the broader community. Some examples include: Carleton University's (n.d.) goal, "to encourage students to participate in service in order to create linkages between academic study and larger public life, and to better understand their roles as global citizens" (para. 2), York University's (n.d.) "commitment to build a more engaged university by facilitating mutually-beneficial collaborations between York University and the Black Creek community" (para. 2), and the University of Windsor's (n.d.) commitment to "research and collaboration with industry, non-profit, government organizations, and community partners" (para. 1). The purpose of these community–university partnerships varies by institution. For example, the University of Toronto (2021) states that through "community engaged learning and research opportunities students can learn from and work with community organizations to contribute to a more just society" (para. 1). Lakehead University (n.d.) asserts that its "Office of Community Programs facilitates community-oriented ancillary programs enabling lifelong learning … [and that] strengthen community relations through developing multi-faceted partnerships with various organizations and expanding innovative educational opportunities for learners" (para. 1). University of Waterloo (n.d.) states its objective to "contribute to the success of our community" and points to "a rich history of giving back to make our community a better place" (para. 1). These examples draw attention to the importance of community engagement within academic institutions across the province.

Ethical University–Community Partnerships: In-Person Interviews

The following section focuses on in-person interview data collected prior to the COVID-19 global pandemic during 2019 and 2020 and addresses the research question: What qualifies university–community partnerships as ethical? Quotations from participant interviews are identified using italicized phrases in quotation marks. The following themes emerged in response to that question: Time-Complexity, Relationships-Ethics, and Vulnerability-Voice.

Time-Complexity

The scholarly foundations of academia have been built upon ideals of reason and order with governance systems that reinforce hierarchical relations of power and control. Benchmarks for success are competitive, instrumental, concrete, and time-sensitive. This context militates against taking time for reflection to shape decision-making, and to build consensus through a long view of time. In this period of disruption, university–community partners have an opportunity to look at relationships in new ways and move forward a social justice agenda by weaving new ideas through consensus-building dialogue over time:

> "There is an actual teaching … and it's the eagle for us in Indigenous cultures, because the eagle never flies straight. The eagle flies in circles because every eagle is always processing the entire scene and looking at the big picture…. Community work takes time … it can take years … slow down and do the process … and if it doesn't go, it doesn't go as we planned … we also have to get the university to understand … so they don't look at it as a failure…. It doesn't always go as planned, so how do we have those contingencies?"

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> "Slow down … do the process … talk about things, consult…. Think through."
> "Taking time to do things right in the first place; don't rush in …."
> "Doing work ethically often requires to do it slowly; we can do that, I just think a lot of people are not very interested in doing it because it's a different set of protocols."

Embracing this expanded view demands a *"holistic"* response to social issues where interventions and change processes *"simultaneously"* address multiple needs. It is a *"non-judgemental engagement"*, where listening through dialogue is unconditional. This process is often *"messy"*, making it difficult to quantify in traditional research, service, and learning frames of reference, which are often *"neo-liberal"* and have a *"very neo-liberal view of [ethics of care]"*. The importance of taking time to explore the *"power, trust, relationship phenomenon*" is clear, and yet at the same time community partners often want *"immediate responses and action now"*. This need is driven by *"underfunding*" and the "*pressure on them to provide more service to more people with less money … and to account for funding with tangible outcome measures"*. Time to engage in building partnerships is a privilege, and community partners are simply *"overwhelmed"* with day-to-day operations. Often, community partners are *"skeptical about [university partners] as there seems to be a political purpose to much of what gets written"*.

Relationships-Ethics

University–community partnerships engage service, research, and teaching. Ethical frameworks from outside of academia can guide efforts to decolonize academia structurally and through practice-based relations with community. For instance, *"the Federation of Native Friendship Centres … has very clear ideas about the type of research that Friendship Centres can engage in with non-Indigenous partners"*. That ethical protocol focuses on being community-driven (giving back to the community) and on the following four principles (see Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres, 2016, p. 5):

- Utility — practical, relevant, and directly benefiting communities
- Self-voicing — knowledge, and practice authored by communities which are fully recognized as knowledge holders and knowledge creators.
- Access — fully recognize all local knowledge, practice, and experience in all their cultural manifestations as accessible by all research authors and knowledge holders?
- Inter-relationality — historically-situated, geo-politically positioned, relational, and explicit about the perspective from which knowledge is generated.

Partnership models built upon these principles of practice aim for an *"integrated relationship"* within a *"larger system"* and for *"holism",* and are directed by a *"holistic"* worldview.

Relationship boundaries are negotiated between personal and professional identities and with regard to the time and space needed as university–community partnerships are developed. These processes are central to service, knowledge, and research partnerships. For all actors in these partnerships:

> "It's all about building relationships … initially sitting and talking…. If the relationship isn't there it will not work…. How could we make it work if we are not even nice and kind and respectful to each other?"

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Praxis-Poiesis

> "It's learning to have new strategies that make space for building relationships and taking time for consensus."
> "It's not what you get out of things. It's that relationship … I was raised in Indigenous ways where the relationship is everything. So, everything you have a relationship with: the earth, you have a relationship with water, you have a relationship with people, and that's the value."
> "The relationship is very important…. I need to have a relationship with a partner … I go out, we meet in person, they know me, I know them. I get to know what works for them, they get to know what our partnerships are … our timelines…. [Some community partners] are just too busy to develop and/or maintain that kind of relationship."

Style of engagement impacts the development of relationships within university–community partnerships. When university partners interact with community using *"institutional academic talk"*, barriers to understanding are erected. In contrast, deep connection can be fostered with an attitude that strives for lateralization of communication and *"being respective of all the community has achieved"*. Through *"dialogue and relationship"* built over time, the problems that may eventually be addressed through university–community partnerships will be revealed. It is essential that the start of the partnership is marked by this process of relationship building and use of *"accessible"* language rather than *"being critical of everything", "talking down"*, or *"talking through jargon"*:

> "Words are powerful and you have to be very careful what you say because once it is out there, you can't take it back. And you speak with respect with people even if you absolutely disagree and you are absolutely mortified…. How can people collaborate if they are not even at that level of speaking respectfully to each other?"

This vision for engagement calls for a *"lateralization of communication"* and a deconstruction of traditional notions of knowledge and *"expertise"*.

Vulnerability-Voice

Stakeholders in university–community partnerships most often hold multiple roles and complex identities. Awareness of the impact of identity in relation to power, privilege, and colonial histories is essential for an ethical turn towards accountability to decolonization of the academy. In this way, a central task that advances social justice is *"to make the invisible visible*". One participant explained the embedded vulnerability in these exchanges as follows:

> "Processes inside organizations often involved white women parading their sense of guilt and shame, and taking the majority of airspace while the organizations didn't engage in structural nor organization change."

Participants identified such rising tensions as familiar occurrences in university–community partnerships when efforts are made to decolonize the academy. Further, faculty members experienced a lack of control over processes in community settings that amplify

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experiences of vulnerability. There is a *"fragile"* quality to these partnerships. It is necessary to be honest about that vulnerability and the points of view that shape the various *"agendas"* of each stakeholder. The sense of control that drives reasoning in the academy is incongruent with the type of relational vulnerability that builds strong university–community partnerships: *"Humility is a key factor that propels an openness to learn, listen, and build towards positive social change."* Further, that entwined experience of vulnerability and humility seems to support efforts to address unequal power relations:

> "Experiential learning and community-based research [is all about] vulnerability…. [University partners] feel vulnerable because they don't have control in the ways they normally do."
>
> "Our students go into settings that are relatively safe … but even so still uncomfortable for most students because they are going someplace they have never been before. They have to talk to real people as opposed to screens … they have to do something they probably have not done before."
>
> "[Community partners] have to hope that the [university partners] will deliver what they promised."

For students, vulnerability is experienced through uncertainty and the reality of inequity within university:

> "There is no textbook to guide [experiential learning in community] … experience serves as the textbook."
>
> "University prepares students to be citizens outside the university, when they have no right to speak within the university…. We had been telling our students, use your voice … if they don't use their voice who will?… There is nothing that would save us if you don't use your voice."

Accepting the complexity of interrelationships is a first step toward addressing inequity. The notion that there are insiders and outsiders within the partnership must be questioned:

> "There is inequity within our system of the university…. There are complexities to voice and equity within the university too, and who has a say … and how about we reimburse others in an equitable way … for their knowledge."

Managing that vulnerability can be messy, and structural change can be slowed as tensions are negotiated. The sense of fragility creates a resistance to individual and organizational change and to authentically listening to the issues impacting our social worlds.

Relationships built upon transparency, vulnerability, humility, and trust are facilitated when exchanges consider equity, *"start with community needs"*, and *"give back to community"* as key outcomes of partnerships. University stakeholders have too often *"extracted*" resources from the community without considering the importance of a *"reciprocal exchange"*. The emphasis needs to be on *"grassroots or it's never going to succeed"*, on doing *"something useful…. so often useful things are small"*. This perspective *"doesn't fit into the traditional university model"*; moreover, *"culture, race and gender play a significant role"* regarding who has the *"power"* to shape the outcomes of partnerships.

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Through university–community partnerships, *"resources are going to that big picture thinking, which is a good thing, but if you are going to do that then you need to put resources into the ground level"*. These points emphasize the value in a radically new way of thinking about knowledge creation, and about partnerships with the academy and their possible productive outcomes. This requires a transilient engagement in which *"we discover profoundly new ways of thinking, acting, and being with community"*. This requires a commitment to finding *"other ways that we can help [community] that we have not thought of before"*. As one participant expressed it: *"What was the point of learning without that leading to actions"*. The community must *"benefit"* and the *"experiential expertise"* of community stakeholders must be *"valued"* as expert knowledge.

Media Reports: Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on University–Community Partnerships

The following section is focused on content analysis of media reports. The data were collected while the COVID-19 pandemic was ongoing. The analysis of findings in this section addresses the question: What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on university–community partnerships?

The sources of data include 46 online Canadian reports relating to the COVID-19 pandemic and university–community partnerships from June 1, 2020 to August 24, 2021. The reports were gathered from selected regional and national Canadian news media outlets including large well-established publications, small community-based publications, and individual university news publications, as well as other publicly and privately funded sources.

The discourse analysis of these media reports uncovered three main themes centred on the roles and responsibilities of universities within these university–community partnerships:

- Supporting social justice movements,
- Promoting health and safety, and,
- Advancing fiscal sustainability.

These themes are perhaps unsurprising given the backdrop provided by the social justice movements that were reignited during the first wave of the pandemic. The pandemic brought concerns about public health and safety given the threat of community spread of the virus. In response, Canada and several other countries closed borders, educational institutions, and non-essential businesses (Government of Canada, 2021). Academic institutions were compelled to adopt public health guidelines that included restricted access to campuses, and teaching, learning, and working remotely.

During the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, social justice movements, including Black Lives Matter, were brought to the forefront of social discourse following the killing by police of George Floyd on May 25, 2020 in the United States, and the release of a video by a spectator at the scene. The video, which quickly went viral (Taylor, 2021), showed a police officer kneeling on Floyd's neck as he begged for his life, telling police, "I can't breathe". Social justice protests demanding action on racial justice across the United States, Canada, and several other countries were ignited. In response, post-secondary schools and other social institutions were called upon to condemn racial violence and discrimination. The President of Brock University release the following message:

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> In 2020, we are all well aware of our interconnected world which we see through the role of the internet or the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, we can feel distant and disconnected from the challenges and pain of others just a block away, let alone a country and a people from away. The United States has its own history, but we should not be naïve about our own past or even present that itself at times demands redress, reconciliation and progressive action. We can distinguish ourselves when our actions and choices are grounded in equal rights and justice and, by so doing, we define who we are as individuals, as a nation and as Canadians. (Brock University, 2020, para. 6)

While acknowledging interconnectedness, attention is drawn to the continued need for action. This discourse on social disparity and exclusion has been a persistent through discourses linking university to community in Canada. These discussions emphasize community-engaged research, and social and structural inequities.

Another prominent social justice issue in Canada, reconciliation, was present in public discourse during the pandemic. As reported in several national and international news media outlets, including the BBC ("Canada: 751 Unmarked Graves", 2021), CNN (Newton, 2021), NPR (Hayward, 2021), and The Guardian (Cecco, 2021), the recovery of mass graves located on the sites of former Indian Residential Schools across the country in the spring and summer of 2021 sparked national and international outrage. On June 2, 2021, Brock University announced having received the gift of a teaching lodge from the Niagara Peninsula Aboriginal Area Management Board (NPAAMB), stating:

> For NPAAMB, this was the perfect opportunity to share and promote Indigenous culture with a supportive community partner that we know will continue to carry the importance of Indigenous learning well into the future. It was very important for us to select partners who understand what reconciliation means and that we can see are making a conscious effort and taking steps towards that. (Brock University, 2021b, paras. 16–17)

This quote demonstrates how Brock University, like other post-secondary institutions, has made efforts to advance reconciliation.

Public health and community safety were at the forefront of public and political discourse during the COVID-19 pandemic. Across Canada, post-secondary academic institutions expressed their commitment to supporting public health initiatives locally, regionally, and more broadly. These initiatives included offering their campus health services, along with student and employee volunteers, for community vaccination clinics; providing donations of personal protective equipment (PPE); and carrying out research and development. In the summer of 2021, when universities were busy planning the fall return to campus after months of remote learning, discourse shifted to "recovery" and "safety". All levels of government (federal, provincial, and municipal) encouraged eligible Canadians to get vaccinated against COVID-19. In the summer of 2021, universities across Ontario and in several other provinces were beginning to mandate vaccines for students and staff in response to public health concerns regarding a serious fourth wave driven by the emerging delta variant of the virus.

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Business and economic development was impacted by the lockdowns that were imposed as part of the efforts to control the pandemic. Non-essential businesses, including restaurants, gyms, and retail spaces, were required to close their doors to the public. This created a significant financial burden for these businesses in the form of months without revenue. In response, universities moved to enhance their efforts to support fiscal sustainability in the community. The focus on economic development in university–community partnerships aims to benefits both the community and the university, and requires ongoing investment in order to sustain itself.

It was not business alone that struggled with the pandemic. On February 1, 2021, Laurentian University filed for insolvency in Sudbury, Ontario, becoming the first Canadian university ever to seek creditor protection (Friesen, 2021). Laurentian noted that the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the institution's financial strain, and that the drop in international student enrolment had been particularly impactful as international student tuition is substantially higher than domestic students. This context underscores the precarious context of financial integrity for post-secondary institutions.

Discussion & Conclusions

This critical ethnographic study into university–community partnerships spanned 3 years from 2018 to 2021 and was ongoing during the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of the study was to formulate an ethical frame of reference that could facilitate exchanges within university–community partnerships, and secondarily to analyse the impact of COVID-19 on university–community partnerships. Themes that emerged through the data analysis led us to profile how university–community partnerships may move forward with renewed vision for ethical engagements, one that accounts for social, economic, and racial disparity in a post-COVID-19 world: time-complexity; relationships-ethics; vulnerability-voice; supporting social justice movements; promoting health and safety; and advancing fiscal sustainability.

Drawing on findings from this study, and on processes informing decolonizing efforts in post-secondary contexts (see Mitchell et al., 2018), an ethical frame of reference is proposed for university–community partnerships under the title Praxis-Poiesis: Intentional Allyship, Reciprocal Relationships, Transilience. "Praxis-poiesis" indicates a creative bridging of the ideas of the academy with real-life practice in a community to make something entirely new. The principles of praxis-poiesis are "intra-grated" through intentional allyship, reciprocal relationships, and a commitment to transilience:

Intentional Allyships – Create safe spaces (physical, psychological, social, political); privileged stakeholders speaking out; stepping up while also stepping aside; creating space for the voice of equity-seeking stakeholders.

Reciprocal Relationships – Built on principles of allyship and a commitment to a social justice agenda; mutual benefits; consensus-building; giving back to the community, not extracting from it, while caring for the fiscal sustainability of programs and services.

Transilience – Abrupt change, a leap to create something new, informed by principles for decolonizing the academy; considers time in complex terms; a sense of urgency and simultaneously a commitment to the long view of change and the need to invest in relationships.

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This study was guided by a theoretical framework that combined transdisciplinarity and quantum feminisms. The ethical frame of reference is congruent with this theoretical conceptualization as its focus is on decentring privileged stakeholders through allyships with equity-seeking community members to build something completely new. Through reciprocal relationships and consensus-building, university–community partnerships are positioned to rethink and transform structures and processes for change. The notion of transilience indicates a leaping across, an abrupt change, and in this instance the ethical turn is facilitated by a mixing of praxis with poiesis among university–community partners. There is a definite process, yet sequencing is spectral and diffuse (Stull, 1984). This is a non-linear and non-binary engagement where notions of university and community as two distinct camps must be abandoned for a radically new relationality that embraces vulnerability over expertise in the quest for socially just change. This is not possible under existing structures; instead, a decolonizing of relationships and lateralization of communication becomes necessary.

The conditions of uncertainty and disruption shaping this epoch of twin pandemics (COVID-19 and racial disparity) have established a context demanding transilient change — a leap to something entirely new to address the urgent need to rethink how power, voice, and knowledge are deployed in our society. In this context, ethical university–community relationships are imbued with a deep appreciation of the urgency of the current epoch, and with a commitment to a long view of change and consensus-building. Through this frame of reference, critical consciousness of the relationships among power, vulnerability, and social justice are given space to breathe. Praxis-poiesis through university–community partnerships emphasizes relational reciprocity, vulnerability, and humility, and an ethic of care for health, safety, and the fiscal sustainability of programs that engage service, teaching, and learning.

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