Critical Considerations of Power in Academia: An Emerging Theory of Growth Rooted in The Margins of Love, Solidarity and Praxis

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Abstract

This paper is an exploration of the ways in which power is enacted and reproduced within the academy, as well as a consideration of possibilities for growth at both the personal and the institutional levels. The authors worked together in an academic setting. One of the authors is a tenured faculty member, and the other two authors were staff managing the graduate program and its practicum education stream. Using individual and collective auto-ethnography, as well as critical grounded theory approach to data collection and analysis, the authors suggest a theory of growth that is rooted in the margins of love, solidarity, and praxis.

Keywords: *theory of change, love, solidarity, neoliberalism, collective autoethnography*

Introduction and Background

The university is both a place for autonomous, free, and innovative thought as well as a powerful location for repressive reproductions of knowledge, identity and society. It is then, perhaps, uniquely situated to be a site of paradox, a location containing realities that conflict. Brownlee (2015) describes the contradiction as a tension created by a university that services power while at the same time supporting the development of tools that critique this power. This university space is where belonging/not belonging, valid/invalid, and good/bad are established in what (Henry, Dua, James, Kobayashi, Li, Ramos, & Smith, 2017) describe as "ironic ways" in their book about race, Indigeneity and equity in Canadian universities. Likewise, the authors of this paper, in our exploration of power enactments within the academic setting, often had the experience of smoke and mirrors: reality and truth seemed to remain in perpetual flux.

We participated in an individual and collective autoethnographic exploration of power within our academic setting. We each kept written personal reflections about day to day experiences at the university where we worked. Once a month, we shared our reflections and conducted a collective autoethnography based on our reflections. We considered different aspects of power enactment and reproduction, as well as the potential for personal and institutional growth.

Lincoln (2018) places the State[1] within the enclosure of the neoliberal market. The State influences the environment of the University, which then impacts the ways in which staff, administration, faculty and students are able to identify themselves and exercise power and autonomy. With a EuroWestern neoliberal ideology[2] that determines particular definition of success aligned with a capitalist market, needs to be defined activities are measured through such mechanisms as tests, scores,

rubrics, teacher evaluations, annual performance reviews, and publishing standards which are tools for new forms of governance, surveillance, dominance and control (Wright, 2008). Like a matryoshka doll, students are held within the purview of the educators and staff, who are within the gaze of the university administration, which is, in turn, under the surveillance of the State, which is under the scrutiny of the neoliberal marketplace, all contained within the Euro/Western colonial enclosure.

Post-secondary institutions have been critiqued for oppressions and exclusions that are embedded into their structures (Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002; Bhattacharyya, 2013; Chomsky, 2015; Giroux, 2009; hooks, 2014; Van Katwyk and Case, 2016). Structural conditions are reproduced in many ways: through building layout, policies and protocols, documentation templates, and discourses that are portrayed via language and images (Smith, 2005). Structural conditions are also reproduced by the exchanges that occur on the interpersonal level within the institution (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, 2011; Gillies, Burleigh, Snowshoe, Werner, 2014).

"The many qualities of society are perfectly duplicated in the structures of universities" (Chandrashekar, Lacroix, & Siddiqui, 2018)[3], determining who is marginalized and therefore exploited, undervalued, and hyper-surveilled. As a reflection of larger society, a process of marginalization occurs within the institution in order to sustain a status quo that privileges a particular and small faction of the system (Billo and Mountz, 2016). Marginalization occurs through silencing, criminalizing, and invalidating. Such methods are often simultaneous processes, indistinguishable in terms of impact and outcome. Ahmed describes how the methods overlap: "Sometimes silence can be a tool of oppression; when you are silenced, whether by explicit force or by persuasion, it is not simply that you do not speak but that you are barred from participation…"[4] (Ahmed 2010).

Those who are marginalized experience diminished power, autonomy and mobility. Those who are centered experience optimal power, autonomy and mobility. Marginalization and centering are based primarily on worldview, class, gender, race, sexual orientation, language proficiency, ability, and religion.

Battiste (2018a), in her work to decolonize education, describes Eurocentrism as the macro issue under which neoliberalism lives. She refers to Blaut (2012), who described Eurocentrism as the placement of a EuroWestern perspective at a centre that is held to be superior in all ways, most progressive, and holding a legitimized monopoly of knowledge systems. Battiste (2018b) describes the impact of Eurocentrism as a cognitive imperialism, where there occurs a colonial domination of worldview, language, knowledge, and practice repeatedly enacted and validated through and within the domains of science, education, and other public institutions.

Blaut (2012, p. 1) describes the mobility that exists at the EuroWestern center as Eurocentric diffusionism,

> "a theory about the way cultural processes tend to move over the surface of the world as a whole. They tend to flow out of the European sector and toward the non-European sector. This is the natural, normal, logical, and ethical flow of culture, of innovation, and of human causality. Europe, eternally, is Inside. Non-Europe is Outside"[5].

When we consider worldview, culture, class, race, gender, ability, and sexual orientation to be significant in the ways they intersect with and define a EuroWestern organization of society and human lives, we can consider how diffusionism directs whose knowledge is superior and thereby gifted with a

global, societal, and structural autonomy. When we consider the ways in which the university replicates systems of oppression existing within society at large, we can construct a parallel movement map across the levels of post-secondary education, with a flow out to the margins and back to delineate levels of power, mobility and autonomy. It is in this process that we can see the replication of societal organization within university structures. For instance, classist, racist, sexist, and ableist organizing within society and within the university determines exploitability, visibility, surveillance, resourced-ness, connections, and influence. The lower down the hierarchy, the more dangerous, fragile, dispensable, and incompetent a person is perceived to be. The replication of social hierarchies and organizing the form of race, gender, and educational status was evident in the research conducted by Hartlep, Hensley, Wells, Brewer, Ball, and McLaren (2017). Their research revealed a homophily- the love for sameness -- in university settings as it examined the racial, gender and educational background of fellows attached to the American Educational Research Association Fellowship program. Analysis of one-decade old data about the fellows revealed that the program was mainly populated by White male researchers who attained doctoral degrees from prestigious universities and who were nominated by former fellows holding similar social and educational positions.

Beagan (2005) points to the everyday classism within a medical school where students from lower income class background are marginalized and made to feel out of place. These students expressed concern about the disrespect towards basic human dignity through derogatory remarks typically made by lecturers, clinical faculty and fellow students about patients experiencing poverty (Beagan, 2005). Similarly, Langhout, Roselli, and Feinstein (2007),

in exploring measures of classism in academic settings, find that when students do not match the "wealthy and white" academia, they are more likely to have negative experiences at the hands of peers, teachers and/or institutions. Elias and Solis (2018) suggest strong links between violence against women, the gender-based violence embedded in the University and the violence that is integral to patriarchal State structures. Machida (2018) describes how the distress that is associated with gender dysphoria for university students is magnified by the incapacity of university structures to provide support and awareness. Cruz et al. (2018), in their consideration of the silence that exists in universities with regards to sexual violence, insist that racism and sexism are at the root of the lack of acknowledgement embedded within university structures and processes that purportedly are meant to create non-violent spaces free of harassment.

In her article, Staley (2018) problematizes many of the efforts to find solutions in the cis-[6] and heteronormative environments of educational institutions. She suggests that when we attach our practices to the outcome of a more inclusive educational (and social) space, we run the risk of becoming stuck, pedalling furiously without movement in structures that resist such change. Instead, the work of changing spaces, according to Staley (2018), is to become comfortable with the discomfort of paradox, engaging in equity work while acknowledging the impossibility of equity work. Rather than focusing on a particular outcome of change, Staley (2018) calls upon the attendance to process. It is the process of pursuing equitable change where we can avoid becoming immobilized within structures steeped in a neoliberal agenda, such as the academy (Battiste, 2018a, 2019; Chomsky, 2015; Giroux, 2009; hooks, 2014).

Part of the immobilization is the product of the neoliberal valorization of scientific rationality and empirical thought that stresses the essential need for a fixed and certain outcome. In his elaboration of the potential of queering academic spaces, Ferguson (2013) also describes a focus on process, rather than outcome, that creates possibilities and autonomy. Inspired by the uncertainty and embrace of paradox that is at the core of queer theory, individuals and communities can relinquish the neoliberal need for fixed answers that are guided by the strict binaries and categories that reproduce inequitable relations.

In a similar vein, Absolon and Dion (2017) describe how the focus on outcome for Indigenous individuals in the university ignores the significance of process and, thus, reproduces colonizing relationships. The university is, they contend, a colonial structure, pervasive enough to become an internalized process. They write, "Internalized colonialism operates within each of us. Even as we work to understand it, colonialism continues to impact our actions and interactions particularly when we are working within institutions steeped in colonial practices" (2017).[7]

In their study of Canadian universities, Henry et al. (2017) found gaps in the structures so that even diversity and equity policies did not create positive change for racialized and Indigenous staff and faculty. In fact, they found there were fewer racialized and Indigenous staff and faculty at universities during their research, than 15 years earlier, when diversity and equity policies had not yet been widely instituted. They suggest that the policies that were implemented focused on overt acts of racism, thereby unable to stop the microaggressions and harassments that are part of the university environment for racialized, Indigenous faculty, staff, and students. Kelley, in his on-line editorial critique of the university institution's

responses to racism (2016), describes how "the programmatic adoption of diversity, inclusion, and multiculturalism vampirized the energy of a radical movement that began by demanding the *complete transformation* of the social order and the eradication of all forms of racial, gender, sexual, and class hierarchy".[8]

Similarly, Tuck (2018) describes the academic structure as having settler colonial roots that result in various processes whereby individuals get blamed for their oppression, rather than processes that could inspire any real and radical change. Rooted in settler colonialism, she writes, "Indigenous erasure and anti-blackness are endemic" (2018)[9] within academic institutions. She argues that the university, in its replication of settler colonial society, creates labour environments where Indigenous, poor, racialized, disabled, and queer communities are "overcoded" (2018)[10] – hyper-surveilled and made invisible at the same time. Grande (2018) has also closely examined the labour conditions for Indigenous and racialized individuals in the university system, contending that Black and Native bodies have been racialized to serve in the interests of the settler State.

Additionally, critical considerations of disability in the university have interrogated the effects on bodies and minds of the hyper-productivity that characterizes the neoliberal structure (Russo & Beresford, 2015). Goodley describes how "transhuman hyper-normative enhancement is becoming the new normal" (2014)[11], creating an intolerance and shame about any health and life experiences that may interfere with inflated production demands. The neoliberal pressure to produce is rooted in an individualized account of capacity and validity, so that an inability to keep up with the demands of hyper-productivity becomes the failure of the

individual (Nishida, 2016). Brown and Leigh elaborate, stating that "being human in this ableist community or society is not merely being, but being perfect and meeting specific criteria, a particular kind of self and body" (2018)[12], and the rights to citizenship are assessed through heightened surveillance, often under the guise of accommodation support, which, in turn, creates a disclosure dilemma for the individual.

Thus, worldview, race, class, gender, ability, and sexual orientation all intersect to create subjective experiences that are significantly shaped by the neoliberal environments of universities. The processes of a neoliberal environment are deeply influential, so that the oppressions that are integral to such an environment can become internalized. It is important to understand how power is enacted and reproduced within the university system and to find locations and possibilities for resistance, change and growth which can disrupt the oppressive structures and processes.

Research Purpose and Questions

Our project focused upon two research explorations: (i) how power is structured, enacted and reproduced within university structures and (ii) consideration of a theory of growth emerging from the excluded and oppressed margins of academia.

We were exploring inequities within our academic institution as a result of many concerns that had arisen about the harms that were being experienced by staff, students and faculty. In the process, we not only examined the dominant structures, but paid careful attention to the margins which are the institutional sites of exploitation, disrespect, disregard, aggression, ignorance, misrecognition,

undervaluation, and misunderstanding. We paid careful consideration to the full humanity of those who stand in those margins.

Research Methodology

We engaged in critical autoethnography and collaborative autoethnography to document and discuss our experiences and drew upon the elements of grounded theory approach to analyze our findings. In the subsequent sections we present the emergence of the project, situate ourselves as researchers and participants, and describe the three approaches that guided the research process, including the steps in data collection and analysis.

Emergence of Project: Dual Role of Researchers and Research Participants

Author 1 is an associate professor. When this study began, she was not yet tenured. Author 1 has many settler privileges within the institution so that she was able to accommodate, albeit with some difficulty, the production demands of the university. On the one hand, her personal life (cis-gendered, straight, mother research has suggested that being a mother in academia puts women at a disadvantage) was validated by her colleagues and students. On the other hand, this normalized personal life has diminished her authority and voice due to the patriarchal structures of science, hierarchical power dynamics, hyper-productivity demands, and a pedagogy that emphasizes finite expertise, banking methods of teaching, and individualized, competitive approaches to learning and assessment.. The bi-racial family that she grew up in exposed her to many overt acts of racism against her Black sibling; however, it was a family experience that was deeply and unconsciously embedded in the racist structures of child welfare, mental health, corrections, and religion.

Author 1 was asked by her employer to conduct a critical autoethnography of the workplace, after her previous autoethnographic research work had been reviewed. Concerns had been surfacing at the institution about racism, sexism, and classism. The president of the university had begun an investigation that was itself presenting some concerns. Author 1 was encouraged to invite other faculty to join her in the autoethnographic study. Author 1 approached several faculty members who were reluctant to participate in the study because they were busy and vulnerable on their tenure tracks, because the risk was felt to be too great even for tenured faculty, and/or because of a lack of confidence that the investigation could result in any meaningful change. Author 1 was warned about the risk she was placing on her own tenure track, even with the many privileges she was granted within the institution. She decided to continue the investigation and to approach racialized staff within her department with whom she had already built trust relations. Because classism had been already identified as an issue of concern in the institution, Author 1 believed that only including faculty in the study would exclude the experiences of those who were not statused (and classed) in the same way that faculty are.

Author 2 is an Indigenous man from central America with lived experiences of civil war, forced migration, interrupted education, and acculturation processes as a refugee within Canada. When the project was conceptualized, Author 2 was a field liaison and had engaged in sessional teaching at the institute. Also, Author 2 was an alumnus of the same institute. Prior to this position, Author 2 had a long history of collective community development from the perspective of Paulo Freire in Canada and Latin America, and trauma-based clinical work. While navigating the Eurocentric world as a student and a professional, Author 2 often experienced an acute sense of occupying mainstream "white" spaces as an Indigenous refugee.

Instead of encountering sincere attempts at dismantling the dominant structures within academia, Author 2 noticed constant reinforcement of inequities rooted in Eurocentric hegemony and privileges where individuals with certain racial background, credentials and alliances with people in positions of power received benefits that were not accessible to all. Amid repeated experiences of silencing, devaluing, and discrediting by administration, students, and faculty members at the institution, Author 2 was able to build allyship with the co-authors and to openly express critical reflections and the raw emotion of anger. Deconstructing self-oppression in relation to structural oppression continues to be an ongoing process within the life of Author 2, as is the praxis of integrating personal and professional collectivism.

Author 3 is an immigrant who lived in three Asian countries prior to coming to Canada through the federal skilled program. Author 3 worked in international civil society organizations involved in the ecumenical movement where she supported the empowerment of youth, women, migrant workers and social development practitioners. Author 3 also worked in a non-government organization working towards poverty eradication and corporate social responsibility. Having immersed in multi-disciplinary social sciences endeavours and having lived and worked in a cosmopolitan city, Author 3 felt well-equipped and capable to face challenges related to experiences of migration. As an educated professional, Author 3 felt confident that she would be able to adapt well and pursue a healthy and safe life for her family. The Canadian context however brought to the forefront the deep-rooted internalized oppression and sense of inferiority towards Western culture and worldviews formed through the long colonial history of her peoples and the global South. As a racialized woman, Author 3 had to deal with both internalized and

systemic oppressions, mostly in the form of racism and sexism, and her everyday experiences consist of choosing what sorts of micro and macro aggressions to ignore (and therefore perpetuate), challenge or resist. Author 3 seeks to find the humanity in people that embody kindness, justice, and hope.

Critical Authoethnography

As a research team of three, we chose to use the research method of critical autoethnography. Critical autoethnography is a method of research that entails a critical self-examination on the part of the researcher (Ellis, 2004). With the critical autoethnographic method, we, the researchers, interrogate in order to both recognize and challenge ourselves as active reproducers of unjust and inequitable social systems (Ellis, 2004; Van Katwyk and Seko, 2017). It is only through critical self-observation that our efforts at change become more than superficial (Bauder and Engel-Di Mauro, 2008).

Collaborative Critical Autoethnography

As a team, we regularly shared our autoethnographic reflections with one another in order to engage in further collaborative autoethnographic exploration. When autoethnographic work becomes collaborative, we are able to critically re-assess an individualized account of knowledge production and validity (Gale, Pelias, Russell, Spry, & Wyatt, 2013). Collaborative autoethnography is used to gain an understanding of one another's experiences and reflections, and places the researcher in the revealing position of researcher and object of research (Chang, Ambura, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2012; Gale et al., 2013; Toyosaki, Pensoneau-Conway, Wendt, & Weathers, 2009; Pensoneau-Conway, Bolen, Toyosaki, Rudick, & Bolen, 2014). Toyosaki et al. (2009) describe the accomplishments of collaborative autoethnography as a self-construction, self-discovery, and the

building of relationships that ripple out to include readers who are being provided with the inside perspective of, in the case of this research project, experience within academia.

Critical autoethnography and collaborative critical autoethnography are critical qualitative methodologies. While qualitative approaches to research have gained in traction across many disciplines and practices since the 1990's (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), there has been a renewed methodological conservatism spreading across the social sciences (Denzin & Giardina, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), indicative of a growing neoliberal ideology throughout academia (Van Katwyk & Case, 2017). Educational theorist, Michael Apple (2001), describes the allegiance that academia has to both 'pure' evidence and marketable growth. Such an environment helps to sustain and promote a neoliberal hegemony that is unconcerned with and even invested to discourage the transformation of inequitable social structures. Evidence is established so that the power dynamics of traditional conceptualizations of validity and rigour are not acknowledged (Tracy, 2010; Van Katwyk & Case, 2017). Furthermore, the power imbalances that shape the ways in which observations are made and validated go unexplored (Weiler, 2011).

It is important to claim the significance and truths that qualitative approaches to research are able to access. An assertion and determination of the validity of such research serves to resist a neoliberal ideology that calls for generalizability, objectivity, and reliability (Tracy, 2010; Winter, 2000). Tracy (2010) has developed eight markers with which to establish the value of qualitative methods of research: (a) worthy topic, (b) rich rigour, (c) sincerity, (d) credibility, (e) resonance, (f) significant contribution, (g) ethics, and (h) meaningful coherence.

We have considered these markers in our own critical autoethnographic work. An examination of power dynamics within the academic institution is an important and timely exploration, in our acknowledgement that academia can be a powerful site of the reproduction of inequity and injustice. Rich rigour is related to research that is theoretically driven, and carefully carried out over an adequate period of time. We remained entrenched in theoretical possibilities and relevancies through our grounded theory approach to analysis for almost two years of regular dialogue, data collection, literature review, and theoretical considerations. Sincerity refers to the transparency and critical reflexivity of a research exploration. Our collaborative work enhanced the sincerity of our research, as we deepened our critically reflexive explorations through honest, sometimes difficult, dialogue with one another. Credibility was also accomplished through the collaborative components of the research, where shared dialogue was member checked for accuracy and to support further exploration. Resonance, in reference to the transferability of produced knowledge, was accomplished due to the structural exploration that constituted our study: the academic processes guided by neoliberal (EuroWestern) ideology exist across institutions and societal structures. As critical researchers, we are committed to the call to engage in research in order to facilitate social change, establishing the significance of the contribution we have dedicated this study to. In terms of ethical strength, our processes and our current theoretical position emerged out of both procedural and relational ethics. The ethical approval we received from our institutional Research Ethics Board was not enough, and we added a commitment to be trustworthy, critically reflexive, and respectful to one another, enacting an ethic of other-care. Finally, we built meaningful coherence into our study through ongoing, documented dialogue where we linked research and theory in an iterative manner, guided by Charmaz' (2014) approach to

grounded theory analysis, as well as a stated commitment to create opportunities for change with our research work.

Data Collection and Analysis Processes

For over a year, we met together regularly to conduct a critical autoethnographic exploration of our experience of the academic institution. Our team was diverse in terms of gender, racialized experience, education, first language and job position. Personal autoethnographic reflections were made and then shared in group dialogue format (please contact Author 1 if you would like an example). The objective of these dialogues was to remain critically reflexive in our autoethnographic explorations, with guiding questions about our own responses and the reproducing function of those responses. We examined our own conduct, our responses to the conduct of others, the ways in which our institutional behaviour was being guided by policies and protocols, and the critical function of such policies. These dialogues were carefully documented and then member-checked for the accuracy of the reflections of the dialogues. Initially, the member-checked dialogues were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2012) approach to qualitative thematic analysis, where we explore the data for patterns of themes and subthemes. Our analysis was based on our interpretation of the themes that emerged from the entire data set. We considered the latent level of the themes (McGuire & Delahunt, 2017), where ideologies, conceptualizations, and assumptions determined the themes that emerged. We used an inductive approach to analysis, where we considered the data itself rather than the research question (Braun and Clarke, 2012) to see what was emerging from the interviews (McGuire & Delahunt, 2017). We began our thematic analysis by immersing ourselves in the documented dialogues. One author did the initial coding, which was shared with

the other two authors. Together, we considered the codes, and then organized and defined the emerging themes. After the thematic analysis was complete, we drew upon the strategies proposed by Charmaz (2014), we engaged further in an iterative process of data collection analysis through dialogue, ongoing review of the literature, and writing, comparing our narratives and lived experiences, and inductively developing conceptual/abstract categories or processes that can help us develop a theory of growth. We used the constructivist grounded theory approach of Charmaz (2014) so that we could negotiate and re-negotiate our findings and the literature, in the context of dialogue, in order to theorize about the possibilities for growth. Charmaz's grounded theory approach acknowledges the subjectivity of the researcher who is constructing and interpreting data from within the social contexts and interactions. According to Charmaz, subjectivity cannot be separated from social existence (2014).

Findings

From the analysis, four major themes emerged: (i) the lines of power distribution; (ii) sustenance of the power dynamic; (iii) the impact and consequences of the power dynamic; and (iv) the emergence of theory of growth.

Theme 1. The Lines of Power Distribution

We found that the methods that established significance and power were those of surveillance, the nature and location of the working spaces, and the autonomy each position is able to exercise without penalty. These methods for establishing power were overlapping, so that one method resulted in or influenced the other methods. For example, one workspace was shared by several female staff, and had been renovated so that it could be easily seen into. Also, the shared dining area within this workspace was eliminated, which removed the opportunity to share a break

and meal together in the space itself and, thereby, altered the work schedules of the staff working here. Surveillance was heightened and autonomy was reduced in a workspace that was located at the centre of the administrators', faculty's and staff travels through the institution. At a higher rung on the hierarchy are the administrators, men and women, whose workspaces are on the highest floor in the building, in a hallway off the beaten path that is primarily inhabited by administrators and their immediate support staff, predominantly women.

Theme 2. Sustenance of Power Dynamic

We explored the ways in which reality gets defined and organized with the end product of sustaining the power dynamic. We were struck by the ways in which we and other institutional players co-created "victimhood" and "innocence" in a number of institutional events in ways that prevented a disruption of the power dynamic. For example, at a team gathering, a racialized team member unapologetically asserted that they had experienced racism within the team. A White team member exclaimed with hurt and anger that they were deeply upset about this suggestion that racism could occur within the team. The exclamation was emotional enough that we fell silent, so as not to further injure this distressed teammate. In our collaborative autoethnographic critical consideration of this shared event and our own silent responses, we described the feelings of confusion that had arisen in that moment. A sense of reality had been momentarily shaken about who had, in fact, been injured within the culture of our team.

Realities were manipulated and established by institutional leaders, out of which policies did or did not occur. For example, in one of the departments, the cap for student enrolment had climbed significantly to more than double over a period of 3

years. One of the authors, a racialized woman, is the manager of the academic program. Not a sentence Her position entails much contact with students and leaders in the community who might be able to provide students with internship opportunities. In a meeting with the Department Head and office manager, she asked to receive more administrative support for her team. This request was refused, and, instead, the Department Head suggested time management training. The office manager asked questions in a loud voice, standing while she sat, about the number and relevance of the meetings she attended throughout the week. For several days afterwards, the author felt unsettled and diminished by this experience. She was unable to talk about the experience without tears. During one recounting, she said, with confusion and sadness, "My mother never chastised me as a child!" Now, as an adult and as a leader, she was being chastised under circumstances that were unfair, without a process in place that would be able to prevent or even condemn such conduct. A reality had been constructed that left her incompetent and, therefore, ineligible for departmental support and resources.

We also considered the ways silencing and erasing happen, how belonging and exclusions are established and normalized, and how humanity is preserved or withheld according to the lines of power at play. We observed the multiple methods of compliance to a status quo that we and others engaged in to support the current organization of power. For example, we considered how meeting minutes were taken, drafted, and then approved. In most of our meetings, minutes were taken by the assistant to the person with the most status in the meeting. These minutes were drafted by the assistant and then first approved by the person they worked for as an assistant, before being presented at the next meeting for approval by all the meeting participants. There were times when some participants believed these minutes did not reflect the full content of the meeting discussion, yet there

was no process in place to verify an accurate and full representation. As well, the objections to the minutes were carried out by the meeting participants with enough status to verbalize without risk, re-enacting once again the ways in which power is organized.

Finally, we considered the many policies and protocols our everyday behaviour was guided by, as well as the socio-political maps that were created by proximities, seating arrangements, and building design elements that also contributed to enactments of power. Architects Murphy and Ricks (2013) describe how spaces are built and designed to reinforce and camouflage power relations. If left uninterrogated, Murphy and Ricks insist that architects and designers continue to engage in structural violence. We considered how uninterrogated use of space fails to disrupt structural violence. For example, in a central hallway, portraits of current and past institutional leaders line one of the far walls. Alongside this wall is a ramp, as the entrance way into the next portion of the building is raised by four steps which are located centrally. Those in wheelchairs are thus marginalized by the placement of the ramp, and their existence is erased by placing portraits in a way that simply cannot be seen from the viewpoint of a wheelchair occupant.

Theme 3. Impact and Consequences of Power Dynamics

In our autoethnographic inquiry, we found that the impact of the power dynamic was significant and eroding of wellbeing, at the individual level as well as within the culture of the institution. The emotional impact was despair, hopelessness, and defensiveness. For example, annual performance reviews were conducted at the time of our study. A manager documented concerns about "unethical" and "inappropriate" conduct that had not been brought forward previously for a

racialized male. For a racialized woman, concern was reported about her "obtuse" communication style. These performance reviews felt unfair to the extent that both wondered about how their gender and race had impacted the way in which they were being construed. The process for challenging such reviews was unclear and required significant risk taking on the part of the two staff, who individually needed to present their concerns to the superior of their manager, thus, two rungs above on the hierarchy ladder. For both, historical and personal trauma was activated by the experience. For an extended length of time, they each carried a heavy sense of despair, traumatic stress, and helplessness in ways that permeated beyond their workplace.

Resilience was another evident response, with individuals supporting one another with check ins, and reaching out to one another in times of need. These resilient responses were found to have parameters that were reflective of the power dynamic within the larger institution, and also forged by perceptions about where safety could be had from within the power field. For example, close connections based on shared experience and trust were formed that served as 'personal reality checks': when someone has felt aggressed in a way that is unacknowledged and yet feels as if one has been Othered by reason of race, gender, and/or class, they could check in with one another to have their sense of having been aggrieved validated.

At times, these acts of resilience raised concerns for co-workers and managers, who described the close connections as being cliquey, non-collegial, and unproductive. The result was a shared sense of having been surveilled, and renewed feelings of defensiveness, self-consciousness, and inferiority as this self-sustaining response had become construed as inappropriate professional conduct by a person with higher status and the ability to officially assess performance in a

way that could compromise ongoing employment. However, the resilient response was not dampened, and instead strengthened with the formation of stronger and larger coalitions and planned privacy to escape surveillance after our research work was complete.

We had reflected upon the impact of our collective critical autoethnography and critical consciousness-raising dialogue. The transformation, the trust, and the reflexive learning had been deep and meaningful. In our conviction that critical consciousness-raising dialogue is a significant response that brings healing, change, and possibilities for political, radical love, one of the authors at the university invited a few colleagues to meet together as a coalition against discrimination and systemic oppression. The coalition began as an occasional shared midday meal, and has evolved into a weekly dialogue where concerns, hurts, and change opportunities are discussed. These dialogues have become important to each member, as reflected by regular participation through times of personal hardship, high professional demand, and employment-related uncertainty. Change opportunities have been carefully planned and operationalized, so that new processes are being implemented within the institution as a result of the actions we had organized. For example, one member requested that at the beginning of each department meeting, a discussion about racism occurs. Other members vocally supported this suggestion. As a result, racism is now an ongoing agenda item during the regular meeting.

When we speak of resilience, it is conceptualized as being immersed in community, connection, and resistance to the status quo. Our findings do not reflect a resilience described as individualized responses of hardiness and

adaptation: rather, we encounter a resilience that directs responsibility to structures, systems, and communities (Thomas, Mitchell, & Arsineau, 2016; Van Katwyk & Seko, 2019). We suggest that in solidarity, we experience resilience in the critical recognition of our constructed experiences of inequity and oppression. We experience resilience in a collaborative understanding that change needs to happen at the institutional level rather than at the individual psychological level (Thomas, Mitchell, & Arsineau, 2016).

Theme 4. Emergence of Theory of Growth

There were also resistances and resilience that were experienced as moments of disruption. What was being disrupted was the reality as it is organized to sustain the status quo. These were the moments in shared space, such as program meetings, where direct questions, institutional reality checks[13], and suggestions for change occurred in a collective and collaboratively planned way. The mutual support within our research team that defied the institutional and normative parameters of safety was used to interrogate the system and one's own experience of privilege through gender, class, race, and institutional status as a way of raising consciousness. In these moments, the sense of helplessness could lift. These were the moments where our research felt most like Action Research, as the benefits of engaging in research were immediate, and the research process was contributing to a sense of change, action and solution (Cahill, Quillada, and Bradley, 2010; McDonald, 2012). Change was the personal transformation that occurred with the raised consciousness of critical and collaborative reflection about the risks and benefits of taking responsibility and becoming accountable to one's own reproducing conduct, assumptions and reality formation.

As we continued to engage in collaborative autoethnography, we encountered an unexpected concept: love. We had come to conceptualize oppressive conduct, policies, and protocols as dehumanizing and belittling. We examined, for example, the experience of being chastised by co-workers, seeking to understand the implications of such interactions. We began to think about change, and discussed how it is with love that we are able to sustain the full humanity of another person. We discussed the ways that writers such as Franz Fanon, John Borrows, bell hooks, Eve Tuck, Paulo Freire, and various liberation theologists talked about love, not in an individualistic and micro-romantic way, but as revolution, solidarity, praxis, and agency. For Author 2, love, trust and solidarity had initially emerged in open and reflective conversations with Author 3. These conversations were rooted in the shared values and experiences of liberation theology, community organizing, and social activism in different parts of the world. These co-authors (non-faculty) gradually began to engage in critical and difficult conversations about personal experiences of racism, sexism and other forms of oppressions within the academic institution with Author 1, who is a White settler faculty member. Author 2 gained a transformative understanding of responsibility to power dynamics during these dialogues and the writing process. For Author 2, the entire research process reaffirmed the belief that one does not have to follow anyone else's way of being. Together, we began to consider how the dismantling of power structures (including self-oppression) requires a personal journey of solidarity, praxis and love, as well as the courage to engage in ethical conversations as part of a trust building process.

Discussion: An Emerging Theory of Growth

We began with a theoretical consideration about the very concept of power, in terms of how it is distributed and the consequences of such distribution within an

academic institution. We found that in terms of the lines upon which power is distributed and organized, the impact of the institutional hierarchy was substantial, as well as the impact of gender and race which play a role in how power was being distributed. Our findings reflect the social space of the university as it is described by Bourdieu (1990) in his examination of social dynamics, normative behaviour, capital and power distribution.

According to Bourdieu, social environments are like playing fields, and individuals enter into these fields with various levels of capital that provide varying levels of status. The individuals negotiate status constantly with one another in this shared social space, conferring or withholding status based on each individual's capital. In the university setting, Bourdieu and Passeron (2000) have described how status and capital are determined and sustained through carefully designed negotiations. The very structures of the university setting construct the manner in which negotiations occur, thereby sustaining the distribution of capital, status, and privilege. The distribution is inequitable as a means of constructing an almost absolute hierarchy.

It is not possible to consider how institutional hierarchies are sustained without applying an intersectional analysis about how such hierarchies are constructed in the first place. With an intersectional lens, class, racialization, Indigeneity, gender, sexual orientation, language, and ability converge in ways that reflect the subjectivity and complexity of social position (Collins, 2002; Crenshaw, 1990; hooks, 2000). Access to the entry points that mark the various rungs on the hierarchical ladder of the academic institution is pre-determined by such complex social locations (Henry et al., 2017). Hierarchy is born of inequality: voices,

identities, needs, knowledges, and experiences are ranked in order of an imagined significance (power) to the operations of the institution.

After engaging in a collaborative thematic analysis, we returned to the literature, and then added further collaborative autoethnographic memos based on our deeper considerations of the data and the literature. We explored literature that could extend our exploration of the themes that had emerged from the autoethnographic work, specifically focusing on the impact and consequences of oppression, the ways in which those consequences can be responded to, and ideas about a theory of growth. The literature exploration was about oppression, colonization, love as a decolonizing and socially just response, and the tenets of critical reflexivity, centering the margins, hope, and change found in liberation theology, critical pedagogy, and much decolonial theoretical work.

In our considerations about love as a theoretical concept, an emotion, and an energy that could support resistance, we discovered an explanation for our research process. The process was experienced as transformative and healing. This was an unexpected experience, where transformative and healing love became an integral aspect of a research project. The research process reflected a discerning, trusting, and humanizing stance that contradicted the oppressive facets of the systemic power we were interrogating. bell hooks (2001) has suggested that "love is an act of will"[14]: It is both an intention and an action that implies choice.

Our collaborative autoethnography was able to bring forward a power from within, understood as our personal agency and praxis. Our process of looking inwards to ourselves, guided by collaborative conversations, surfaced the impacts of

dominating/repressive/oppressive power through our stories of woundedness. The sharing of these stories of pain had been gradual and began with superficial events to deep and honest insights which could have come only when trusting relationships had been formed. It was important to know that we shared a commitment to and a pursuit of justice. The love ethic framed our intention of critical and often uncomfortable truth telling in exposing inequities within the academic institution due to authoritarian or self-aggrandizing exercises of power. Because of the harsh inequity embedded in hierarchical power relations and neoliberal ideology guiding the academy, we agree with Robinson-Morris' (2018) claim assertion that academia needs to be revolutionized through re-imagination and re-evaluation. Furthermore, the revolution we aspire to is one that is guided by love as a politicized, complex, and intentional response.

The deep dive to our inner self, awareness and power as a collective helped us discover, understand and attempt to heal our hurt, accept and recognize our power so we could climb back up towards the ethics of love, experienced by one team member as a "climbing up towards the light, onto the surface with the loving energy". A love ethic entails mutuality, sharing of resources and power and ensuring each person's growth. Robinson-Morris (2018), inspired by deep and active collectivity, paying particular attention to educational institutions, reminds us that "love is an ethic; it is an ethical, social, political, cultural responsibility and commitment to truth, to overcoming domination, oppression, and subordination"[15]. He contends that love, like education, is political.

Liberation theology has much to offer in our considerations of love. Liberation theology aligns closely with Marxist critiques of the capitalist, neoliberal structures that organize humans to encounter one another as things rather than human beings

(Gutierrez, 2004; McLaren and Jandrić, 2017). Love is a significant source of growth and resistance in the context of a network of objectifying social interactions. The almost impossible endeavour to bring about change can result in two unhelpful responses: to either succumb and absorb and replicate the operations of the structure, or to focus on improving the self rather than the system. Love is an alternative response that must not be a romantic one (steeped in capitalistic notions of relationship), but must remain political. Love and liberation are to be intertwined concepts, so that we love in the moment, in our smallest gestures and our one-on-one encounters, but always in the name of bringing change to the world (Clark, 2013; McLaren and Jandrić, 2017). Indigenous theologian Willie Ermine (2007) describes in a parallel way an ethical space that is constituted by full embrace, acceptance, and regard for the other. He also describes this as an imaginary space, one that cannot be fully realized within the context of a colonizing neoliberal structure. However, our ethical and loving ways of relationship can be anticipatory, and can be invested towards the potential of a just and liberated world (McLaren and Jandrić, P. 2017).

Anticipatory, loving relationship building requires creativity. "Imaginative social movements bond people through the art of creating what does not exist rather than in making demands of a system too corrupt or limited to understand or address the moral and spiritual vision of such a movement" (Brock, 2017).[16] Grassroots organizer Nadinne I. Cruz describes social movements that are based on an imagined justice as "civic arts": "the imaginative is essential, and the rendering of what has been only in one's imagination into reality is through one's engagement and participation in shaping our social order. It is as if the various social worlds in

which we live are our artwork, our participation and engagement is our art process, and the medium of this civic artwork is one's self" (Cruz, 2008).[17]

The kinds of relationships that can occur in creative spaces of imagination can result in a deep solidarity. Networking groups can support one another's common actions towards creating a "just and peaceful world, and a sustainable planet" (Brock, 2017).[18] Such groups engage in acts of hope that centre the voices of those who are oppressed. Brazilian educator and philosopher, Paulo Freire, with his emancipatory engagements with people oppressed by societal structures, shared a vision of hope that was about resisting hate and making "every effort to ensure that love has the final word" (Kirylo, 2017).[19]

McLaren (1991) introduces an emancipatory praxis to be found at the crossroads of liberation theology and critical pedagogy. We find ourselves also at this crossroads. For a theory and practice to be liberating, we must engage in a way of thinking about resistance that is informed by the experiences of the oppressed. Similarly, Tuck and Yang (2014) describe a pedagogy of refusal that begins with the oppressor resisting oppressive practice followed by the oppressor joining in the resistance. In such a way, sovereignty is returned to those traditionally oppressed in a collaborative and cooperative refusal process of change. As an example, one of the authors, an Indigenous man of colour, first received information about complaints by an unidentified number of his students as content in the annual performance review that went to the Director of the university. The Director instructed the author's immediate supervisor to address the matter in writing, however, the Department Head intervened and changed the content of the letter drafted by the immediate supervisor. The author responded, verbally and in writing, by identifying the racism that was rooted in the complaints and in the letter

that had been modified by the Department Head. Additionally, he was able to identify the racism evident in the manner in which the complaint process had been managed. The event was significantly unsettling for the author, whose physical and mental health began to be impacted. In the name of personal wellbeing, he accepted a leadership position at a large social service agency and left academia. Sometime later, he was offered a sessional teaching position in another of the university's departments for a course he had taught before and had special expertise in. The Director, when informed of this, withdrew the contract. The faculty member who had suggested the offer questioned the Director, who cited "heinous ethical behaviour" as being the reason for his decision. In response, the faculty member wrote a letter of concern, where she very clearly identified, in a claim to knowledge and understanding, her vantage point as an immigrant racialized woman. From this vantage point, she challenged the conduct of the Director and the associated processes for their racist, colonizing attributes. This faculty member emailed the letter to all of the faculty of her department, as well as the Director and the Academic Chair of the university. This resulted in two separate meetings between her, the Director and the President of the university. During those meetings, she reiterated the concerns expressed in her letter. The President agreed to investigate the matter and approached the former employee. Subsequently, the President apologized to him for the racism he faced at the institution during his tenure and reinstated his sessional teaching position. This story reflects some of the important aspects of Tuck and Wang's pedagogy of refusal. A series of racist procedures from higher up in the institution had occurred, and were met with refusals: the author refused to agree to an unjust performance review and thereby established/reclaimed professional competence; the author refused to remain in a structure that would traumatize and diminish him- thus

claiming an autonomy and choice; a racialized, female colleague refused to silently witness an injustice; and the same colleague refused to be invalidated and minimized by claiming her marginalized position as a place of knowledge and strength. The changes were about reclaiming autonomy, competence, value, voice, knowledge, and strength. We suggest that this level of change can establish a momentum, as solidarities get formed, acknowledgements made, and those in power respond in ways that align with the refusals of oppression.

In our academic institution, we discovered a hierarchical organization of power reproduced by multiple processes that obscure the ways worldview, class, gender, race, sexual orientation, language proficiency, ability, and religion determine where people are positioned and how people are oppressed. We suggest a theory of growth, influenced by Tuck's (2018) challenge to settler colonial theories about change. Settler colonial theories of change rely upon narratives about diminished lives that superiorize the lives of Western subjects. A false sense is created that awareness about these diminished lives is enough to create change. What is not acknowledged or even brought to consciousness by such an understanding about change is that the diminishment of those lives is what, in fact, sustains colonial relations and inequitable distributions of power. The voices, experience, and knowledge of those whose lives have been diminished within societal institutions such as academia continue to be eradicated. Resistance and refusal create space and substance where the beginning point of growth is in the voices and knowledges of those who have been diminished by unjust institutional processes. In our considerations of love as solidarity, collective resistance and community-immersed resilience, we are compelled by Tuck's suggestion that it would take much more than awareness on the part of superiorized Western subjects to shift the very

processes that support the superiority of the Western subject. Instead, we find guidance in the questions Tuck (2018) asks of us:

"But what if we -- as communities, as collectives -- were to disbelieve awareness as change? What if we, as Indigenous peoples, as people of colour, as disenfranchised peoples, believe that our own awareness, our own knowing, is enough to make change? What if we did not wait for others to also know, but are inspired by our own knowing? What if we hold true that we are the ones who need to know, and not others? What if we believe that we are the ones who can make change, and that others are not more powerful than us to effect change? These are the radical questions that throb at what gets taken for granted as the work of social justice…." [20]

Conclusions and Implications

The project that has been described in this paper has itself become a process of growth, as we engaged in reflexive consideration and critical dialogue about the ways in which power is enacted and reproduced in an academic setting. As institutional beings we found ourselves creating and co-creating the culture of dominance through our status within the system. We were boxed into a set of policies and protocols that keep the university machinery churning out knowledge products for societal consumption to fit within a neoliberal ideology. Power is used to control for efficiency and effectiveness of educational service delivery, often resulting in dehumanizing regard for institutional actors. Even spaces for free thinking, theoretical musings, and critical reflexivity seemed commodified such that they are only allocated or reserved for those who are paid to teach, do

research, and provide service according to their faculty performance expectations. The power to initiate such knowledge generation endeavours within the university setting is constrained by hierarchical structures.

While there may be expectations to do what has been explicitly prescribed and implicitly socialized, we as community members experience human connections and the interconnectedness of their spirit and energy in various forms. The web of relationships created through human to human interactions are inevitable. For us, these engagements fostered understanding as we shared stories of trauma alongside stories of resistance, resilience and possibilities for healing. The ongoing dialogues, thinking aloud and making sense of how power resides in individuals and institutions developed and manifested love.

The theory of growth that has emerged from our research is that growth can happen when we centralize the ideas, responses and knowledge that come from those most negatively impacted by the status quo of oppression -- those silenced, exploited, marginalized, aggressed against, undervalued and under attributed. While a traditional theory of change considers long term goals and then works backward to create a road of causal links (Taplin and Clark, 2012), the theory of growth that we are introducing is a non-linear process that centers and begins with the voices, knowledges, and standpoints of those most oppressed by a system in such a manner as to facilitate relationships of love, hope, and healing. The love is manifested through encountering the full humanity of one another with intentional and collaborative relationship building fostered by respect, regard, critical reflexivity, openness, and humility to accept each other's strengths and uniqueness. Hope illuminates the imaginary to which all action is geared: freedom from injustice, a better world, with justice and equity for all. Each gesture of love

becomes a wilful act towards improved political, economic, social, personal, and environmental relationships that will build a better world.

We end with a series of questions, embracing the 'not knowing' that comes with a focus on the process of growth rather than outcome. The questions that get asked with a circular, constant, fluid process of growth are themselves circular and ongoing, so that one question does not simply precede the other; each question gets revisited and reconsidered throughout the process:

● **How can we support growth**? With this question, a process of love, reflexivity, collectivity, and collaboration is considered.

● **Why do we support growth**? With this question, reflexivity is used to conduct a power analysis in order to better understand the transformation that is being called upon, both personally and systemically.

● **Where are we headed**? With this question, hope, imagination, creativity, and anticipation are activated in order to never lose sight of the intention of making the world better by moving in the direction of socially just transformation for all.

Notes

[1] We understand and discuss State as a society organized under a government that has the power to enforce obedience and which is, itself, not externally controlled. We are further influenced by Foucault's (2007) focus on the importance of the mechanisms by which the State imposes and remains immune to control.

[2] A EuroWestern reference acknowledges that the dominant neoliberal ideology is not limited to European positioning, rather there is a geopolitical reality that acknowledges the colonization that has permeated and shaped the Western hemisphere.

[3] CLS, 2018, p.12

[4] Ahmed, 2010, p. 16

[5] Blaut, 2012, p. 1

[6] We acknowledge that the term cis- has been interrogated due to the fact that it emphasizes biological state and fails to reflect the complexity and materiality that patriarchy imposes. We use this term to acknowledge the significant privilege that is granted to individuals who are identified by others and who identify themselves according to their anatomical gender at birth. We do not presume that such privilege is shared equally among men and women who gender-identify/are gender-identified with their anatomical gender at birth (Cis). Cis women continue to be profoundly disadvantaged relative to cis men. Cis women around the world carry a greater burden of poverty, experience more violence and exploitation in their intimate, social, political, and labour relations, and are disproportionately disciplined within social structures such as education, psychiatry, health, and social services. The complexity and level of violence is well-reflected in the intersections of race, Indigeneity, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status through inequities of access, opportunity, and support. Patriarchy and neoliberal reliance upon binaries has a profound impact on subjective experience. Similarly, we acknowledge White privilege, without discounting the impact of patriarchy.

[7] Absolon and Dion, 2017, p. 92

[8] Kelley, 2016.

[9] Tuck, 2018, p. 150

[10] Tuck, 2018, p. 155

[11] Goodley, 2014, p. 25

[12] Brown and Leigh, 2018, p. 988

[13] Reality checks are here described as the critical review of an interaction or decision that is oppressive yet construed by policy, power, and protocol as being harmless, constructive, or only oppressive to those with the lion's share of power.

[14] hooks, 2001, p.1

[15] Robinson-Morriss, 2018, pg 27

[16] Brock, 2017, p. 171

[17] Cruz, 2008

[18] Brock, 2017, p. 171

[19] Kirylo, 2017, p. 597

[20] Tuck, 2018, p. 160

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