

Chapter 12

R-Words: Refusing Research

Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang

This is not a story to pass on.

—Toni Morrison (1987, p. 275)

. . . I knew that there were limits to what I could ask—and then what I could say . . .

—Audra Simpson (2007, p. 73)

We're telling all of you, but we're not telling anyone else.

—Fred Moten and Stefano Harney (2010, p. 5)

Research is a dirty word among many Native communities (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999), and arguably, also among ghettoized (Kelley, 1997), Orientalized (Said, 1978), and other communities of overstudied Others. The ethical standards of the academic industrial complex are a recent development, and like so many post-civil rights reforms, do not always do enough to ensure that social science research is deeply ethical, meaningful, or useful for the individual or community being researched. Social science often works to collect stories of pain and humiliation in the lives of those being researched for commodification. However, these same stories of pain and humiliation are part of the collective wisdom that often informs the writings of researchers who attempt to position their intellectual work as decolonization. Indeed, to refute the crime, we may need to name it. How do we learn from and respect the wisdom and desires in the stories that we (over)hear, while refusing to portray/betray them to the spectacle of the settler colonial gaze? How do we develop an ethics for research that differentiates between power—which deserves a denuding, indeed petrifying scrutiny—and people? At the same time, as fraught as research is in its complicity with power, it is one of the last places for legitimated inquiry. It is at least still a space that proclaims to care about curiosity. In this essay, we theorize refusal not just as a “no,”

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but as a type of investigation into “what you need to know and what I refuse to write in” (Simpson, 2007, p. 72). Therefore, we present a refusal to do research, or a refusal within research, as a way of thinking about humanizing researchers.

We have organized this chapter into four portions. In the first three sections, we lay out three axioms of social science research. Following the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990), we use the exposition of these axioms to articulate otherwise implicit, methodological, definitional, self-evident groundings (p. 12) of our arguments and observations of refusal. The axioms are: (I) The subaltern can speak, but is only invited to speak her/our pain; (II) there are some forms of knowledge that the academy doesn’t deserve; and (III) research may not be the intervention that is needed. We realize that these axioms may not appear self-evident to everyone, yet asserting them as apparent allows us to proceed toward the often unquestioned limits of research. Indeed, “in dealing with an open-secret structure, it’s only by being shameless about risking the obvious that we happen into the vicinity of the transformative” (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 22). In the fourth section of the chapter, we theorize refusal in earnest, exploring ideas that are still forming.

Our thinking and writing in this essay is informed by our readings of postcolonial literatures and critical literatures on settler colonialism. We locate much of our analysis inside/in relation to the discourse of settler colonialism, the particular shape of colonial domination in the United States and elsewhere, including Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. Settler colonialism can be differentiated from what one might call exogenous colonialism in that the colonizers arrive at a place (“discovering” it) and make it a permanent home (claiming it). The permanence of settler colonialism makes it a structure, not just an event (Wolfe, 1999). The settler colonial nation-state is dependent on destroying and erasing Indigenous inhabitants in order to clear them from valuable land. The settler colonial structure also requires the enslavement and labor of bodies that have been stolen from their homelands and transported in order to labor the land stolen from Indigenous people. Settler colonialism refers to a triad relationship, between the White settler (who is valued for his leadership and innovative mind), the disappeared Indigenous peoples (whose land is valued, so they and their claims to it must be extinguished), and the chattel slaves (whose bodies are valuable but ownable, abusable, and murderable). We believe that this triad is the basis of the formation of Whiteness in settler colonial nation-states, and that

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the interplay of erasure, bodies, land, and violence is characteristic of the permanence of settler colonial structures.

Under coloniality, Descartes' formulation, *cognito ergo sum* ("I think, therefore I am") transforms into *ego conquiro* ("I conquer, therefore I am"; Dussel, 1985; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Ndlvou-Gatsheni, 2011). Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2009) expounds on this relationship of the conqueror's sense-of-self to his knowledge-of-others ("I know her, therefore I am me"). Knowledge of self/Others became the philosophical justification for the acquisition of bodies and territories, and the rule over them. Thus the right to conquer is intimately connected to the right to know ("I know, therefore I conquer, therefore I am"). Maldonado-Torres (2009) explains that for Levi Strauss, the self/Other knowledge paradigm is the methodological rule for the birth of ethnology as a science (pp. 3–4). Settler colonial knowledge is premised on frontiers; conquest, then, is an exercise of the felt entitlement to transgress these limits. Refusal, and stances of refusal in research, are attempts to place limits on conquest and the colonization of knowledge by marking what is off limits, what is not up for grabs or discussion, what is sacred, and what can't be known.

To speak of limits in such a way makes some liberal thinkers uncomfortable, and may, to them, seem dangerous. When access to information, to knowledge, to the intellectual commons is controlled by the people who generate that information [participants in a research study], it can be seen as a violation of shared standards of justice and truth. (Simpson, 2007, p. 74)

By forwarding a framework of refusal within (and to) research in this chapter, we are not simply prescribing limits to social science research. We are making visible invisibilized limits, containments, and seizures that research already stakes out.

One major colonial task of social science research that has emerged is to pose as voicebox, ventriloquist, interpreter of subaltern voice. Gayatri Spivak's important monograph, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (2010), is a foundational text in postcolonial studies, prompting a variety of scholarly responses, spin-offs, and counterquestions, including *does the subaltern speak? Can the colonizer/settler listen? Can the subaltern be heard? Can the subaltern act?* In our view, Spivak's question in the monograph, said more transparently, is *can the subaltern speak in/to the academy?* Our reading of the essay prompts our own duet of questions, which we move

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in and out of in this essay: *What does the academy do? What does social science research do?*

Though one might approach these questions empirically, we emphasize the usefulness of engaging these questions pedagogically; that is, posing the question not just to determine the answer, but because the rich conversations that will lead to an answer are meaningful. The question—What does or can research do?—is not a cynical question, but one that tries to understand more about research as a human activity. The question is similar to questions we might ask of other human activities, such as, why do we work? Why do we dance? Why do we do ceremony? At first, the responses might be very pragmatic, but they give way to more philosophical reflections.

Returning to Spivak's question, in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Spivak casts Foucault and Deleuze as “hegemonic radicals” (2010, p. 23) who

unwittingly align themselves with bourgeois sociologists who fill the place of ideology with a continuistic “unconscious” or a parasubjective “culture” In the name of desire, they tacitly reintroduce the undivided subject into the discourse of power . . . (pp. 26–27)

Observing Foucault and Deleuze's almost romantic admiration for the “reality” of the factory, the school, the barracks, the prison, the police station, and their insistence that the masses know these (more) real realities perfectly well, far better than intellectuals, and “certainly say it very well,” (Deleuze, as cited in Spivak, 2010, p. 27), Spivak delivers this analysis: “The ventriloquism of the speaking subaltern is the left intellectual's stock-in-trade” (2010, p. 27). Spivak critiques the position of the intellectual who is invested in the ventriloquism of the speaking subaltern for the banality of what serves as evidence of such “speech,” and for the ways in which intellectuals take opportunity to conflate the work and struggle of the subaltern with the work of the intellectual, which only serves to make more significant/authentic their own work (p. 29). All of it is part of a scheme of self-aggrandizing.

Rosalind Morris, reading Spivak, criticizes nostalgia in the academy that “bears a secret valorization and hypostatization of subalternity as an identity—to be recalled, renarrated, reclaimed, and revalidated” (2010, p. 8).

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Subalternity is less an identity than what we might call a predicament, but this is true in a very odd sense. For, in Spivak's definition, it is the structured place from which the capacity to access power is radically obstructed. To the extent that anyone escapes the muting of subalternity, she ceases being a subaltern. Spivak says this is to be desired. And who could disagree? There is neither authenticity nor virtue in the position of the oppressed. There is simply (or not so simply) oppression. Even so, we are moved to wonder, in this context, what burden this places on the memory work in the aftermath of education. What kind of representation becomes available to the one who, having partially escaped the silence of subalternity, is nonetheless possessed by the consciousness of having been obstructed, contained, or simply misread for so much of her life? (Morris, 2010, p. 8)

We take this burden of speaking in/to the academy, while being misrecognized as the speaking subaltern or being required to ventriloquate for the subaltern, as a starting dilemma for the work of representation for decolonizing researchers. It is our sense that there is much value in working to subvert and avert the carrying out of social science research under assumptions of subalternity and authenticity, and to refuse to be a purveyor of voices constructed as such.

This is the place from which we begin this essay, inside the knowledge that in the same ways that we can observe that the colonizer is constituted by the production of the Other, and Whiteness is constituted by the production of Blackness (Fanon, 1968; Said, 1978), the work of research and the researcher are constituted by the production and representation of the subaltern subject. Further, as we explore in Axiom I, representation of the subject who has "partially escaped the silence of subalternity" (Morris, 2010, p. 8) takes the shape of a pain narrative.

Axiom I: The Subaltern Can Speak, but Is Only Invited to Speak Her/Our Pain

Elsewhere, Eve (Tuck, 2009, 2010) has argued that educational research and much of social science research has been concerned with documenting damage, or empirically substantiating the oppression and pain of Native communities, urban communities, and other disenfranchised

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communities. Damage-centered researchers may operate, even benevolently, within a theory of change in which harm must be recorded or proven in order to convince an outside adjudicator that reparations are deserved. These reparations presumably take the form of additional resources, settlements, affirmative actions, and other material, political, and sovereign adjustments. Eve has described this theory of change¹ as both colonial and flawed, because it relies upon Western notions of power as scarce and concentrated, and because it requires disenfranchised communities to position themselves as both singularly defective and powerless to make change (2010). Finally, Eve has observed that “won” reparations rarely become reality, and that in many cases, communities are left with a narrative that tells them that they are broken.

Similarly, at the center of the analysis in this chapter is a concern with the fixation social science research has exhibited in eliciting pain stories from communities that are not White, not wealthy, and not straight. Academe’s demonstrated fascination with telling and retelling narratives of pain is troubling, both for its voyeurism and for its consumptive implacability. Imagining “itself to be a voice, and in some disciplinary iterations, *the* voice of the colonised” (Simpson, 2007, p. 67, emphasis in the original) is not just a rare historical occurrence in anthropology and related fields. We observe that much of the work of the academy is to reproduce stories of oppression in its own voice. At first, this may read as an intolerant condemnation of the academy, one that refuses to forgive past blunders and see how things have changed in recent decades. However, it is our view that while many individual scholars have chosen to pursue other lines of inquiry than the pain narratives typical of their disciplines, novice researchers emerge from doctoral programs eager to launch pain-based inquiry projects because they believe that such approaches embody what it means to do social science. The collection of pain narratives and the theories of change that champion the value of such narratives are so prevalent in the social sciences that one might surmise that they are indeed what the academy is about.

In her examination of the symbolic violence of the academy, bell hooks (1990) portrays the core message from the academy to those on the margins as thus:

No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you I write

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myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still colonizer the speaking subject
and you are now at the center of my talk. (p. 343)

Hooks's words resonate with our observation of how much of social science research is concerned with providing recognition to the presumed voiceless, a recognition that is enamored with knowing through pain. Further, this passage describes the ways in which the researcher's voice is constituted by, legitimated by, animated by the voices on the margins. The researcher-self is made anew by telling back the story of the marginalized/subaltern subject. Hooks works to untangle the almost imperceptible differences between forces that silence and forces that seemingly liberate by inviting those on the margins to speak, to tell their stories. Yet the forces that invite those on the margins to speak also say, "Do not speak in a voice of resistance. Only speak from that space in the margin that is a sign of deprivation, a wound, an unfulfilled longing. Only speak your pain" (hooks, 1990, p. 343).

The costs of a politics of recognition that is rooted in naming pain have been critiqued by recent decolonizing and feminist scholars (Hartman, 1997, 2007; Tuck, 2009). In *Scenes of Subjection*, Sadiya Hartman (1997) discusses how recognizing the personhood of slaves enhanced the power of the Southern slave-owning class. Supplicating narratives of former slaves were deployed effectively by abolitionists, mainly White, well-to-do, Northern women, to generate portraits of abuse that ergo recognize slaves as human (Hartman, 2007). In response, new laws afforded minimal standards of existence, "making personhood coterminous with injury" (Hartman, 1997, p. 93), while simultaneously authorizing necessary violence to suppress slave agency. The slave emerges as a legal person only when seen as criminal or "a violated body in need of limited forms of protection" (p. 55). Recognition "humanizes" the slave, but is predicated upon her or his abjection. *You are in pain, therefore you are*. "[T]he recognition of humanity require[s] the event of excessive violence, cruelty beyond the limits of the socially tolerable, in order to acknowledge and protect the slave's person" (p. 55). Furthermore, Hartman describes how slave-as-victim as human accordingly establishes slave-as-agent as criminal. Applying Hartman's analysis, we note how the agency of Margaret Garner or Nat Turner can only be viewed as outsider violence that humane society must reject while simultaneously upholding the legitimated violence of the state to punish such outsider violence. Hartman asks, "Is it possible that such recognition effectively forecloses agency as the object of punishment . . .

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Or is this limited conferral of humanity merely a reinscription of subjugation and pained existence?” (p. 55).

As numerous scholars have denoted, many social science disciplines emerged from the need to provide justifications for social hierarchies undergirded by White supremacy and manifest destiny (see also Gould, 1981; Selden, 1999; Tuck & Guishard, forthcoming). Wolfe (1999) has explored how the contoured logic of settler colonialism (p. 5) can be mapped onto the microactivities of anthropology; Guthrie (1976) traces the roots of psychology to the need to “scientifically” prove the supremacy of the White mind. The origins of many social science disciplines in maintaining logics of domination, while sometimes addressed in graduate schools, are regularly thought to be just errant or inauspicious beginnings—much like the ways in which the genocide of Indigenous peoples that afforded the founding of the United States has been reduced to an unfortunate byproduct of the birthing of a new and great nation. Such amnesia is required in settler colonial societies, argues Lorenzo Veracini, because settler colonialism is “characterized by a persistent drive to supersede the conditions of its operation,” (2011, p. 3); that is, to make itself invisible, natural, without origin (and without end), and inevitable. Social science disciplines have inherited the persistent drive to supersede the conditions of their operations from settler colonial logic, and it is this drive, a kind of unquestioning push forward, and not the origins of the disciplines that we attend to now.

We are struck by the pervasive silence on questions regarding the contemporary rationale(s) for social science research. Though a variety of ethical and procedural protocols require researchers to compose statements regarding the objectives or purposes of a particular project, such protocols do not prompt reflection upon the underlying beliefs about knowledge and change that too often go unexplored or unacknowledged. The rationale for conducting social science research that collects pain narratives seems to be self-evident for many scholars, but when looked at more closely, the rationales may be unconsidered, and somewhat flimsy. Like a maritime archaeological site, such rationales might be best examined *in situ*, for fear of deterioration if extracted. Why do researchers collect pain narratives? Why does the academy want them?

An initial and partial answer is because settler colonial ideology believes that, in fiction author Sherril Jaffe’s words, “scars make your body more interesting,” (1996, p. 58). Jaffe’s work of short, short of fiction bearing that sentiment as title captures the exquisite crossing of

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wounds and curiosity and pleasure. Settler colonial ideology, constituted by its conscription of others, holds the wounded body as more engrossing than the body that is not wounded (though the person with a wounded body does not politically or materially benefit for being more engrossing). In settler colonial logic, pain is more compelling than privilege, scars more enthralling than the body unmarked by experience. In settler colonial ideology, pain is evidence of authenticity, of the verifiability of a lived life. Academe, formed and informed by settler colonial ideology, has developed the same palate for pain. Emerging and established social science researchers set out to document the problems faced by communities, and often in doing so, recirculate common tropes of dysfunction, abuse, and neglect.

Scholars of qualitative research Alecia Youngblood Jackson and Lisa Mazzei (2009) have critically excavated the privileging of voice in qualitative research, because voice is championed as “true and real,” and “almost a mirror of the soul, the essence of self,” (p. 1). The authors interpret the drive to “make voices heard and understood, bringing meaning and self to consciousness and creating transcendental, universal truths” as gestures that reveal the primacy of voice in conventional qualitative research (p. 1). We contend that much of what counts as voice and makes voice count is pain. In an example drawn from outside of social science research, in Wayne’s work as a writing instructor with Southeast Asian refugee students, he learned from them that much of the writing they were encouraged to do followed a rarefied narrative pattern of refugee-as-victim. As it were, youth and young adults learn these narratives in schools, in which time and again refugee-victim stories are solicited by well-intentioned ESL teachers who argue that such narratives are poetic, powerful, and represent the “authentic voice” of the student. Similarly, Robin Kelley (1997), speaking about the Black experience in Harlem in the 1960s, describes White liberal teachers as “foot soldiers in the new ethnographic army” (p. 20), soliciting stories from their students about pain in their lives and unwittingly reducing their students to “cardboard typologies who fit neatly into their own definition of the ‘underclass’” (p. 17). Such examples of teachers’ solicitations of youth narratives of pain confirm the deep relationship between writing or talking about wounds, and perceptions of authenticity of voice.

Craig Gingrich-Philbrook (2005) articulates a related critique of autoethnography, positioning himself as a “narrator who appreciates autoethnography, at least as compared to its positivist alternatives, but one who simultaneously distrusts autoethnography’s pursuit of legitimacy in the form of the patriarch’s blessing and family values” (p. 298). Gingrich-

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Philbrook locates his concern in what autoethnography/ers are willing to do to secure academic legitimacy (p. 300): “My fears come down to the consequences of how badly autoethnography wants Daddy’s approval” (p. 310). By this Gingrich-Philbrook means that much of autoethnography has fixated on “attempting to justify the presence of the self in writing to the patriarchal council of self-satisfied social scientists” (p. 311). Though Gingrich-Philbrook does not go into detail about how precisely the “presence of the self” is justified via the performativity of subjugated knowledges (what we are calling pain narratives), he insists that autoethnography is distracted by trying to satisfy Daddy’s penchant for accounts of oppression.

In my own autobiographical performance projects, I identify this chiasmatic shift in the possibility that all those performances I did about getting bashed only provided knowledge of subjugation, serving almost as an advertisement for power: “Don’t let this happen to you. Stay in the closet.” In large part motivated by Elizabeth Bell’s writings about performance and pleasure, I decided to write more about the gratifications of same-sex relationships, to depict intimacy and desire, the kinds of subjugated knowledges we don’t get to see on the after school specials and movies of the week that parade queer bruises and broken bones but shy away from the queer kiss. (p. 312)

Participatory action research and other research approaches that involve participants in constructing the design and collection of voice (as data) are not immune to the fetish for pain narratives. It is a misconception that by simply building participation into a project—by increasing the number of people who collaborate in collecting data—ethical issues of representation, voice, consumption, and voyeurism are resolved. There are countless examples of research in which community or youth participants have made their own stories of loss and pain the objects of their inquiry (see also Tuck & Guishard, forthcoming).

Alongside analyses of pain and damage-centered research, Eve (Tuck 2009, 2010) has theorized desire-based research as not the antonym but rather the antidote for damage-focused narratives. Pain narratives are always incomplete. They bemoan the food deserts, but forget to see the food innovations; they lament the concrete jungles and miss the roses and the tobacco from concrete. Desire-centered research does not deny the experience of tragedy, trauma, and pain, but positions the knowing derived from such experiences as wise. This is not about seeing

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the bright side of hard times, or even believing that everything happens for a reason. Utilizing a desire-based framework is about working inside a more complex and dynamic understanding of what one, or a community, comes to know in (a) lived life.

Logics of pain focus on events, sometimes hiding structure, always adhering to a teleological trajectory of pain, brokenness, repair, or irreparability—from unbroken, to broken, and then to unbroken again. Logics of pain require time to be organized as linear and rigid, in which the pained body (or community or people) is set back or delayed on some kind of path of humanization, and now must catch up (but never can) to the settler/unpained/abled body (or community or people or society or philosophy or knowledge system). In this way, the logics of pain has superseded the now outmoded racism of an explicit racial hierarchy with a much more politically tolerable racism of a developmental hierarchy.² Under a developmental hierarchy, in which some were undeterred by pain and oppression, and others were waylaid by their victimry and subalternity, damage-centered research reifies a settler temporality and helps suppress other understandings of time.

Desire-based frameworks, by contrast, look to the past and the future to situate analyses.

Desire is about longing, about a present that is enriched by both the past and the future; it is integral to our humanness. It is not only the painful elements of social and psychic realities, but also the textured acumen and hope. (Tuck, 2010, p. 644)

In this way, desire is time-warping. The logics of desire is asynchronous just as it is distemporal, living in the gaps between the ticking machinery of disciplinary institutions.

To be clear, again, we are not making an argument against the existence of pain, or for the erasure of memory, experience, and wisdom that comes with suffering. Rather, we see the collecting of narratives of pain by social scientists to already be a double erasure, whereby pain is documented in order to be erased, often by eradicating the communities that are supposedly injured and supplanting them with hopeful stories of progress into a better, Whiter, world. Vizenor talks about such “the consumer notion of a ‘hopeful book,’” and we would add hopeful or feel-good research, as “a denial of tragic wisdom” bent on imagining “a social science paradise of tribal victims” (1993, p. 14). Desire interrupts this metanarrative of damaged communities and White progress.

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Axiom II: There Are Some Forms of Knowledge That the Academy Doesn't Deserve

Across academic disciplines, examples of ethical misconduct in human research are abundant. Rebecca Skloot's (2010) account of the experiences of Henrietta Lacks and her children, after cells from Ms. Lacks's cervix were harvested after her death in 1951, without consent, and reproduced in laboratories by the millions, if not billions, portrays the ways in which families can be haunted by decisions made by researchers, long after the facts. More recently, the Havasupai tribe, who live in the Grand Canyon, won a settlement from Arizona State University because of the deceptive practices of a biomedical researcher, Therese Markow (Harmon, 2010). Dr. Markow had permission from the tribe to collect blood samples to study diabetes, but did not have permission to use the samples in the numerous other genetic studies on schizophrenia and on the geographic origins of the tribe that she conducted with her students. Years after the samples had been drawn, members of the tribe learned that their blood had been used to test a variety of theories and conditions—some of which contradicted their own generational knowledge regarding sovereign claims to land. The samples, kept in a freezer on campus, became the stuff upon which researchers earned tenure and promotion, and their doctoral degrees. More than two dozen publications were based on the samples (Harmon, 2010).

Though one might read these cases as instances of misconduct with which only those in the biomedical or biological sciences must be concerned, it is important to point out that the misuse of human cells, blood, or tissue is not only about the handling of such materials, but also about the ways in which those materials are used to construct particular stories and narratives about an individual, family, tribe, or community. The misconduct is in the fabrication, telling, and retelling of stories. Academe is very much about the generation and swapping of stories, and there are some stories that the academy has not yet proven itself responsible enough to hear. We are writing about a particular form of loquaciousness of the academy, one that thrives on specific representations of power and oppression, and rarefied portrayals of dysfunction and pain.

One might ask what is meant by the academy, and by the academy being undeserving or unworthy of some stories or forms of knowledge. For some, the academy refers to institutions of research and higher education, and the individuals that inhabit them. For others, the term applies to the relationships between institutions of research and higher education, the nation-state,

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private and governmental funders, and all involved individuals. When we invoke the academy, or academe, we are invoking a community of practice that is focused upon the propagation and promulgation of (settler colonial) knowledge. Thus, when we say that there are some forms of knowledge that the academy does not deserve, it is because we have observed the academy as a community of practice that, *as a whole*:

- Stockpiles examples of injustice, yet will not make explicit a commitment to social justice
- Produces knowledge shaped by the imperatives of the nation-state, while claiming neutrality and universality in knowledge production
- Accumulates intellectual and financial capital, while informants give a part of themselves away
- Absorbs or repudiates competing knowledge systems, while claiming limitless horizons

Like the previous axiom's question—Why collect narratives of pain?—we ask nonrhetorically, what knowledges does the academy deserve? Beyond narratives of pain, there may be language, experiences, and wisdoms better left alone by social science.

Paula Gunn Allen (1998) notes that for many Indigenous peoples, “a person is expected to know no more than is necessary, sufficient and congruent with their spiritual and social place” (p. 56). To apply this idea to the production of social science research, we might think of this as a differentiation between what is made public and what is kept sacred. Not everything, or even most things, uncovered in a research process need to be reported in academic journals or settings. Contrasting Indigenous relationships to knowledge with settler relationships to knowledge, Gunn Allen remarks,

In the white world, information is to be saved and analyzed at all costs. It is not seen as residing in the minds and molecules of human beings, but as—dare I say it?—transcendent. Civilization and its attendant virtues of freedom and primacy depend on the accessibility of millions of megabytes of data; no matter that the

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data has lost its meaning by virtue of loss of its human context . . . the white world has a different set of values [from the Indigenous world], one which requires learning all and telling all in the interests of knowledge, objectivity, and freedom. This ethos and its obverse—a nearly neurotic distress in the presence of secrets and mystery—underlie much of modern American culture (p. 59)

As social science researchers, there are stories that are entrusted to us, stories that are told to us because research is a human activity, and we make meaningful relationships with participants in our work. At times we come to individuals and communities with promises of proper procedure and confidentiality-anonymity in hand, and are told, “Oh, we’re not worried about that; we trust you!” Or, “You don’t need to tell us all that; we know you will do the right thing by us.” Doing social science research is intimate work, worked that is strained by a tension between informants’ expectations that something useful or helpful will come from the divulging of (deep) secrets, and the academy’s voracious hunger for the secrets.

This is not just a question of getting permission to tell a story through a signature on an IRB-approved participant consent form. Permission is an individualizing discourse—it situates collective wisdom as individual property to be signed away. Tissue samples, blood draws, and cheek swabs are not only our own; the DNA contained in them is shared by our relatives, our ancestors, our future generations (most evident when blood samples are misused as bounty for biopiracy.) This is equally true of stories. Furthermore, power is protected by such a collapse of ethics into litigation-proof relationships between individual and research institution. Power, which deserves the most careful scrutiny, will never sign such a permission slip.³

There are also stories that we overhear, because when our research is going well, we are really in peoples’ lives. Though it is tempting, and though it would be easy to do so, these stories are not simply y/ours to take. In our work, we come across stories, vignettes, moments, turns of phrase, pauses, that would humiliate participants to share, or are too sensationalist to publish. Novice researchers in doctoral and master’s programs are often encouraged to do research on what or who is most available to them. People who are underrepresented in the academy by social location—race or ethnicity, indigeneity, class, gender, sexuality, or ability—frequently experience a pressure to become the n/Native informant, and might begin to suspect that some members of the academy perceive them as a route of easy access to communities that have so far largely eluded researchers. Doctoral programs, dissertations, and the master’s thesis process

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tacitly encourage novice researchers to reach for low-hanging fruit. These are stories and data that require little effort—and what we know from years and years of academic colonialism is that it is easy to do research on people in pain. That kind of voyeurism practically writes itself. “Just get the dissertation or thesis finished,” novice researchers are told. The theorem of low-hanging fruit stands for pretenured faculty too: “Just publish, just produce; research in the way you want to after tenure, later.” This is how the academy reproduces its own irrepressible irresponsibility.

Adding to the complexity, many of us also bring to our work in the academy our family and community legacies of having been researched. As the researched, we carry stories from grandmothers’ laps and breaths, from below deck, from on the run, from inside closets, from exclaves. We carry the proof of oppression on our backs, under our fingernails; and we carry the proof of our *survivance* (Vizenor, 2008) in our photo boxes, our calluses, our wombs, our dreams. These stories, too, are not always ours to give away, though they are sometimes the very us of us.

It needs to be said that we are not arguing for silence. Stories are meant to be passed along appropriately, especially among loved ones, but not all of them as social science research. Although such knowledge is often a source of wisdom that informs the perspectives in our writing, we do not intend to share them as social science research. It is enough that we know them.

Kahnawake scholar Audra Simpson asks the following questions of her own ethnographic work with members of her nation: “Can I do this and still come home; what am I revealing here and why? Where will this get us? Who benefits from this and why?” (2007, p. 78). These questions force researchers to contend with the strategies of producing legitimated knowledge based on the colonization of knowledge.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars of Native education have queried the dangers of appropriation of Native knowledge by mainstream research and pedagogical institutions (e.g., Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006; Richardson, 2011). Lomawaima and McCarty (2006) describe the “safety zone” as ways in which Indigenous knowledges are included into even overtly anti-Indian spaces such as boarding schools designed to assimilate Native children. Indigenous knowledge is made harmless to settler colonial pedagogies by relegating it to the safety zone of the margins. Troy Richardson extends this analysis by discussing “inclusion as enclosure” (2011, p.332), the encircling of Native education as part of a

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well-intentioned multiculturalist agenda. Such gestures, he contends, reduce the Indigenous curriculum to a supplement to a standard curriculum.

Moreover, some narratives die a little when contained within the metanarrative of social science. Richardson (2011) theorizes Gerald Vizenor's concept of trickster knowledge and the play of shadows to articulate a "shadow curriculum" that exceeds the material objects of reference—where much meaning is made in silence surrounding the words, where memories are not simply reflections of a referent experience but dynamic in themselves. "The shadow is the silence that inherits the words; shadows are the motions that mean the silence" (Vizenor, 1993, p.7). Extending Richardson's analysis of Vizenor's work, beneath the intent gaze of the social scientific lens, shadow stories lose their silences, their play of meaning. The stories extracted from the shadows by social science research frequently become relics of cultural anthropological descriptions of "tradition" and difference from occidental cultures. Vizenor observes these to be the "denials of tribal wisdom in the literature of dominance, and the morass of social science theories" (Vizenor, 1993, p. 8).

Said another way, the academy as an apparatus of settler colonial knowledge already domesticates, denies, and dominates other forms of knowledge. It too refuses. It sets limits, but disguises itself as limitless. Frederic Jameson (1981) writes, "[H]istory is what hurts. It is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis" (p. 102).

For Jameson, history is a master narrative of inevitability, the logic of teleos and totality: All events are interconnected and all lead toward the same horizon of progress. The relentlessness of the master narrative is what hurts people who find themselves on the outside or the underside of that narrative. History as master narrative appropriates the voices, stories, and histories of all Others, thus limiting their representational possibilities, their expression as epistemological paradigms in themselves. Academic knowledge is particular and privileged, yet disguises itself as universal and common; it is settler colonial; it already refuses desire; it sets limits to potentially dangerous Other knowledges; it does so through erasure, but importantly also through *inclusion*, and its own imperceptibility.

Jameson's observation also positions desire as a counterlogic to the history that hurts. Desire invites the ghosts that history wants exorcised, and compels us to imagine the possible in what was written as impossible; desire is haunted. Read this way, desire expands personal as well as collective praxis.

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Axiom III: Research May Not Be the Intervention That Is Needed

As social science researchers, we are trained to believe that research is useful (even if only vaguely useful) and that it can compel needed change (even if the theory of change is somewhat fuzzy, or flawed). Indeed, the hidden theory of change in the metanarrative of social science research is that research itself leads to change. This is the hidden curriculum of social science: that the researched need change and that social science will compel it. As such, when we see something that needs attention, resources, critique, or intercession, our initial inclination may be to conduct research on it. We generally do research to meet an unmet need. Yet there are far more instances than are commonly realized in which research is not the most useful or appropriate intervention. They include situations in which:

- The researcher already has a very clear sense of what she wants her research to say or do
- The research is constructed to convince a group of people of something that they are completely closed to hearing
- The research is meant to legitimize community knowledge that is already deeply recognized
- The researcher would like to say something that has already been said, but this time in the voices of youth, community, elders, and so on
- There is too much at stake for a research process to reveal findings that counter a researcher or community's position on an issue

In these instances, research is reduced to a performance of inquiry in order to acquire legitimacy. This is when research is the most cynical about inquiry, and the most conceited about its own efficacy. In cases in which an intervention is needed, there are many other ways of developing and communicating ideas, including billboards, blogs, bumper stickers, letters, compelling spokespersons, flash mobs, YouTube videos, curricula, open houses, community talking tours, postcards, and the many forms of art.⁴

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Many scholars may feel motivated to reimagine such activities as research, presumably in order to expand the umbrella of legitimacy to include more media, or modes of communication. There is an assumption that relabeling some forms of knowledge as research helps to increase the use or influence of those forms of knowledge. Thus we often hear that performance can be research, poetry can be autoethnography, my grandmother's wisdom is a form of research, and so forth. In a critique of autoethnography's appropriation of art, Gingrich-Philbrook describes this domestication of knowledge by social science research as an "epistemological assimilation game" (2005, p. 302) by which the academy "seduces us with its Good Labkeeping Seal of Approval" (p. 306). Indeed, if one were to map a hierarchy of human ways of knowing, research would appear at the top. We contend that although research is a space of inquiry and although it does traffic in cultural capital, there are forms of knowledge better off without the scientific stamp of model citizen knowledge. This is not to say that multimedia and other modes of communication have no place in the academy, but that the label *research* need not be the only descriptor deemed legitimate or valuable.

Research is just one form of knowing, but in the Western academy, it eclipses all others. In this way, the relationship of research to other human ways of knowing resembles a colonizing formation, acquiring, claiming, absorbing, consuming. In the current neoliberal moment, there are few spaces that remain dedicated to human curiosity and human inquiry aside from research. This component of research is valuable, and worth sustaining, yet we must simultaneously protect and nurture other nonresearch spaces/approaches for curiosity and inquiry. Calling everything research doesn't help to ensure that there are multiple opportunities to be curious, or to make meaning in life. We aren't advising anyone to insert artificial or insurmountable barriers between research and other forms of human inquiry, or to think of research and art as impermeable or discrete—just to attend to the productive tensions between genres/epistemologies, to gather the benefits of what might be a dialogical relationship between research and art.

Indeed, there are many instances in which research may not be the best sociopolitical intervention, and it might not even be the best theoretical intervention. Theory works deliciously differently in the social sciences and in art. Consider works such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Joy Harjo's (2003) *No*, and Ken Gonzalez-Day's (n.d.) *Erased Lynching* series (discussed later in this chapter). Each of these works actively theorizes the remnants of domination, the shadows

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of terrible dances and grief songs (see Harjo, 2003, pp. 95-96). Engaging literature and art as theory—especially decolonial literature and art—intervenes upon modes of theorizing in the social sciences, setting limits to social science research and also making those limits permeable to other forms of inquiry. The relationship between research and art can be one of epistemological respect and reciprocity rather than epistemological assimilation or colonization.

Theorizing Refusal

Here is a strange and bitter crop.

—Abel Meeropol, New York City public school teacher
and lyricist of the 1939 Billie Holiday song *Strange Fruit*

In this final section, our task is to engage in a more tentative, more shifting and in-formation discussion of refusal—indeed, a theorizing of refusal as an operationalization of the three axioms we have already presented. Far from axiomatic, this discussion is more speculative and less sure-footed. Here we will consider this question: Without a wholesale dismissal of social science research, how do we understand the researcher’s and researched’s relationships to knowledge circulated and recirculated by the academy? Our discussion relies heavily upon a rich and dynamic 2007 article by Kahnawake scholar Audra Simpson, titled “On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, ‘Voice,’ and Colonial Citizenship.” We engage a close discussion and description of Simpson’s work in order to begin to piece together a methodology around refusal, not as a simple or extremist or prohibitive stance, but as a generative orientation. In part, we are trying to help readers think through what there is instead of pain for social science research to look at, and also to provide some ways of theorizing the political and sovereign advantages of ascribing limits to settler colonial social science research. It is our conviction that once social science research is understood as settler colonial knowledge, nothing less and nothing more, it then makes sense why limits must be placed on it. If social science research is not understood as such, then talk of limits reads as a violation of the universal benefits of knowledge production, and perhaps of humanity itself. There is no rulebook, no set of step-by-step directions to follow for refusal. It means stepping to the side of the march of the academic industrial complex, taking

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stock of its recruiting of conscript knowledges, and formulating ways to do things differently. Refusal, taken seriously, is about humanizing the researcher.

Simpson's (2007) article is in many ways a director's-cut commentary on her ethnography on Mohawk nationhood and citizenship, and is a layered example of refusal centered in the Kahnawake Nation, within which she herself is a member. Simpson opens her article with a critique of the need to know as deeply connected to a need to conquer, a need to govern. In light of this, how Canada "knows" who is and isn't Indigenous is imbricated with law. The Indian Act,

a specific body of law that recognises Indians in a wardship status in Canada, created the categories of person and rights that served to sever Indian women from their communities upon marriage to white men. It did the reverse to Indian men—white women gained Indian status upon their marriage into an Indian community. (p. 75)

In 1984, Bill C-31 amended the act to add Indian women and their descendants back into the federal registry of Indians in Canada, leaving it up to individual nations to determine whether to reinstate them in their local registries. The politics of membership generated a series of massive predicaments for people who had assimilated versions of the law for the past 150 years and found ways to resist it all the same. Kahnawake's own blood quantum membership code, developed in defiance of Canadian regulations for political recognition, was "contested and defended by, it seemed, everyone within the community and sometimes all at once" (p. 73). The question of who is and isn't Mohawk is not only politically contentious but one that is implicated within the very logic of settler colonial knowledge. Instead of surfacing the personal predicaments of "cousins and friends and enemies that comprise my version of Kahnawake" (p. 74), Simpson turns her ethnography toward the ways in which Kahnawake participants incorporated, dismissed, thwarted, and traversed notions of membership, especially via constructions of citizenship that intentionally drew upon logics found outside settler colonialism.

There are three concurrent dimensions of refusal in Simpson's analysis—in Simpson's words, her ethnography "pivoted upon refusal(s)" (p. 73). The first dimension is engaged by the interviewee, who refuses to disclose further details: "I don't know what you know, or what

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others know . . . no-one seems to know.” The second dimension is enacted by Simpson herself, who refuses to write on the personal pain and internal politics of citizenship.

“No one seems to know” was laced through much of my informant’s discussion of C-31, and of his own predicament—which I knew he spoke of indirectly, because I knew his predicament. And I also knew everyone knew, because everyone knows everyone’s “predicament.” This was the collective “limit”—that of knowledge and thus who we could or would not claim. So it was very interesting to me that he would tell me that “he did not know” and “no one seems to know”—to me these utterances meant, “I know you know, and you know that I know I know . . . so let’s just not get into this.” Or, “let’s just not say.” So I did not say, and so I did not “get into it” with him, and I won’t get into it with my readers. What I am quiet about is his predicament and my predicament and the actual stuff (the math, the clans, the mess, the misrecognitions, the confusion and the clarity)—the calculus of our predicaments. (p. 77)

The interviewee performs refusal by speaking in pointedly chosen phrases to indicate a shared/common knowledge, but also an unwillingness to say more, to demarcate the limits of what might be made public, or explicit. The second dimension of refusal is in the researcher’s (Simpson’s) accounting of the exchange, in which she installs limits on the intelligibility of what was at work, what was said and not said, for her readers. Simpson tells us, “In listening and shutting off the tape recorder, in situating each subject within their own shifting historical context of the present, these refusals speak volumes, because they tell us when to stop,” (p. 78). In short, researcher and researched refuse to fulfill the ethnographic want for a speaking subaltern.

Both of these refusals reflect and constitute a third dimension—a more general anticoloniality and insistence of sovereignty by the Kahnawake Nation—and for many, a refusal to engage the logic of settler colonialism at all.

For the purposes of our discussion, the most important insight to draw from Simpson’s article is her emphasis that refusals are not subtractive, but are theoretically generative (p. 78), expansive. Refusal is not just a “no,” but a redirection to ideas otherwise unacknowledged or unquestioned. Unlike a settler colonial configuration of knowledge that is petulantly exasperated

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and resentful of limits, a methodology of refusal regards limits on knowledge as productive, as indeed a good thing.

To explore how refusal and the installation of limits on settler colonial knowledge might be productive, we make a brief detour to the *Erased Lynching* series (2002–2011) by Los Angeles–based artist Ken Gonzales-Day (see Figure 12.1). Gonzales-Day researched lynching in California and the Southwest and found that the majority of lynch victims were Latinos, American Indians, and Asians. Like lynchings in the South, lynchings in California were events of public spectacle, often attended by hundreds, sometimes thousands of festive onlookers. At the lynchings, professional photographers took hours to set up portable studios similar to those used at carnivals; they sold their images frequently as postcards, mementos of public torture and execution to be circulated by U.S. post throughout the nation and the world. Lynching, we must be reminded, was extralegal, yet nearly always required the complicity of law enforcement—either by marshals or sheriffs in the act itself, or by judges and courts in not bothering to prosecute the lynch mob afterward. The photographs immortalize the murder beyond the time and place of the lynching, and in their proliferation, expand a single murder to the general murderability of the non-White body. In this respect, the image of the hanged, mutilated body itself serves a critical function in the maintenance of White supremacy and the spread of racial terror beyond the lynching. The spectacle of the lynching is the medium of terror.

[Insert Figure 12.1 about here].



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Figure 12.1. The wonder gaze (St. James Park).

Gonzales-Day's *Erased Lynching* series reintroduces the photographs of lynching to a contemporary audience, with one critical intervention: The ropes and the lynch victim have been removed from the images. Per Gonzales-Day's website (n.d.), the series enacted

a conceptual gesture intended to direct the viewer's attention, not upon the lifeless body of lynch victim, but upon the mechanisms of lynching themselves: the crowd, the spectacle, the photographer, and even consider the impact of flash photography upon this dismal past. The perpetrators, if present, remain fully visible, jeering, laughing, or pulling at the air in a deadly pantomime. As such, this series strives to make the invisible visible.

The *Erased Lynching* series yields another context in which we might consider what a social scientist's refusal stance might comprise. Though indeed centering on the erasure of the former object, refusal need not be thought of as a subtractive methodology. Refusal prompts analysis of the festive spectators regularly backgrounded in favor of wounded bodies, strange fruit, interesting scars. Refusal shifts the gaze from the violated body to the violating instruments—in this case, the lynch mob, which does not disappear when the lynching is over, but continues to live, accumulating land and wealth through the extermination and subordination of the Other. Thus, refusal helps move us from thinking of violence as an event and toward an analysis of it as a structure.

Gonzales-Day might have decided to reproduce and redistribute the images as postcards, which, by way of showing up in mundane spaces, might have effectively inspired reflection on the spectacle of violence and media of terror. However, in removing the body and the ropes, he installed limits on what the audience can access, and redirected our gaze to the bodies of those who were there to see a murder take place, and to the empty space beneath the branches. Gonzales-Day introduced a new representational territory, one that refuses to play by the rules of the settler colonial gaze, and one that refuses to satisfy the morbid curiosity derived from settler colonialism's preoccupation with pain.

Refusals are needed for narratives and images arising in social science research that rehumiliate when circulated, but also when, in Simpson's words, "the representation would bite all of us and compromise the representational territory that we have gained for ourselves in the

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past 100 years” (p. 78). As researcher-narrator, Simpson tells us, “I reached my own limit when the data would not contribute to our sovereignty or complicate the deeply simplified, atrophied representations of Iroquois and other Indigenous peoples that they have been mired within anthropologically” (p. 78). Here Simpson makes clear the ways in which research is not the intervention that is needed—that is, the interventions of furthering sovereignty or countering misrepresentations of Native people as anthropological objects.

Considering *Erased Lynchings* dialogically with *On Ethnographic Refusal*, we can see how refusal is not a prohibition but a generative form. First, refusal turns the gaze back upon power, specifically the colonial modalities of knowing persons as bodies to be differentially counted, violated, saved, and put to work. It makes transparent the metanarrative of knowledge production—its spectatorship for pain and its preoccupation for documenting and ruling over racial difference. Thus, refusal to be made meaningful first and foremost is grounded in a critique of settler colonialism, its construction of Whiteness, and its regimes of representation. Second, refusal generates, expands, champions representational territories that colonial knowledge endeavors to settle, enclose, domesticate. Simpson complicates the portrayals of Iroquois, without resorting to reportrayals of anthropological Indians. Gonzales-Day portrays the violations without reportraying the victimizations. Third, refusal is a critical intervention into research and its circular self-defining ethics. The ethical justification for research is defensive and self-encircling—its apparent self-criticism serves to expand its own rights to know, and to defend its violations in the name of “good science.” Refusal challenges the individualizing discourse of IRB consent and “good science” by highlighting the problems of collective harm, of representational harm, and of knowledge colonization. Fourth, refusal itself could be developed into both method and theory. Simpson presents refusal on the part of the researcher as a type of calculus ethnography. Gonzales-Day deploys refusal as a mode of representation. Simpson theorizes refusal by the Kahnawake Nation as anticolonial, and rooted in the desire for possibilities outside of colonial logics, not as a reactive stance. This final point about refusal connects our conversation back to desire as a counterlogic to settler colonial knowledge.

Desire is compellingly depicted in Simpson’s description of a moment in an interview, in which the alternative logics about a “feeling citizenship” are referenced. The interviewee states,

Citizenship is, as I said, you live there, you grew up there, that is the life that you know—that is who you are. Membership is more of a legislative enactment

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designed to keep people from obtaining the various benefits that Aboriginals can receive. (p. 76)

Simpson describes this counterlogic as “the logic of the present,” one that is witnessed, lived, suffered through, and enjoyed (p. 76). Out of the predicaments, it innovates “tolerance and exceptions and affections” (p. 76). Simpson writes (regarding the Indian Act, or blood quantum), “‘Feeling citizenships’ . . . are structured in the present space of intra-community recognition, affection and care, outside of the logics of colonial and imperial rule” (p. 76).

Simpson’s logic of the present dovetails with our discussion on the logics of desire. Collectively, Kahnawake refusals decenter damage narratives; they unsettle the settler colonial logics of blood and rights; they center desire.

By theorizing through desire, Simpson thus theorizes *with* and *as* Kahnawake Mohawk. It is important to point out that Simpson does not deploy her tribal identity as a badge of authentic voice, but rather highlights the ethical predicaments that result from speaking as oneself, as simultaneously part of a collective with internal disputes, vis-à-vis negotiations of various settler colonial logics. Simpson thoughtfully differentiates between the Native researcher *philosophically* as a kind of privileged position of authenticity, and the Native researcher *realistically* as one who is beholden to multiple ethical considerations. What is tricky about this position is not only theorizing *with*, rather than theorizing *about*, but also theorizing *as*. To theorize *with* and *as* at the same time is a difficult yet fecund positionality—one that rubs against the ethnographic limit at the outset. Theorizing with (and in some of our cases, as) repositions Indigenous people and otherwise researched Others as intellectual subjects rather than anthropological subjects. Thus desire is an “epistemological shift,” not just a methodological shift (Tuck, 2009, p. 419).

Culmination

At this juncture, we don’t intend to offer a general framework for refusal, because all refusal is particular, meaning refusal is always grounded in historical analysis and present conditions. Any discussion of Simpson’s article would need to attend to the significance of real and representational sovereignty in her analysis and theorizing of refusal. The particularities of

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Kahnawake sovereignty throb at the center of each of the three dimensions of refusal described above. We caution readers against expropriating Indigenous notions of sovereignty into other contexts, or metaphorizing sovereignty in a way that permits one to forget that struggles to have sovereignty recognized are very real and very lived. Yet from Simpson's example, we are able to see ways in which a researcher might make transparent the coloniality of academic knowledge in order to find its ethical limits, expand the limits of sovereign knowledge, and expand decolonial representational territories. This is in addition to questions her work helpfully raises about who the researcher is, who the researched are, and how the historical/representational context for research matters.

One way to think about refusal is how desire can be a framework, mode, and space for refusal. As a framework, desire is a counterlogic to the logics of settler colonialism. Rooted in possibilities gone but not foreclosed, "the *not yet*, and at times, the *not anymore*" (Tuck, 2010, p. 417), desire refuses the master narrative that colonization was inevitable and has a monopoly on the future. By refusing the teleos of colonial future, desire expands possible futures. As a mode of refusal, desire is a "no" and a "yes."

Another way to think about refusal is to consider using strategies of social science research to further expose the complicity of social science disciplines and research in the project of settler colonialism. There is much need to employ social science to turn back upon itself as settler colonial knowledge, as opposed to universal, liberal, or neutral knowledge without horizon. This form of refusal might include bringing attention to the mechanisms of knowledge legitimation, like the Good Labkeeping Seal of Approval (discussed under Axiom III); contesting appropriation, like the collection of pain narratives; and publicly renouncing the diminishing of Indigenous or local narratives with blood narratives in the name of science, such as in the Havasupai case discussed under Axiom II.

As long as the objects of research are presumably damaged communities in need of intervention, the metanarrative of social science research remains unchallenged: which is that research at worst is simply an expansion of common knowledge (and therefore harmless), and that research at best is problem solving (and therefore beneficial). This metanarrative justifies a host of interventions into communities, and treats communities as frontiers to civilize, *regardless of the specific conclusions of individual research projects*. Consider, for example, well-intended research on achievement gaps that fuels NCLB and testing; the documentation of youth violence

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that provides the rationales for gang injunctions and the expansion of the prison industrial complex; the documentation of diabetes as justification for unauthorized genomic studies and the expansion of anti-Indigenous theories. Instead, by making the settler colonial metanarrative the object of social science research, researchers may bring to a halt or at least slow down the machinery that allows knowledge to facilitate interdictions on Indigenous and Black life. Thus, this form of refusal might also involve tracking the relationships between social science research and expansions of state and corporate violence against communities. Social science researchers might design their work to call attention to or interrogate power, rather than allowing their work to serve as yet another advertisement for power. Further, this form of refusal might aim to leverage the resources of the academy to expand the representational territories fought for by communities working to thwart settler colonialism.

We close this chapter with much left unsaid. This is both because there is so much to say, and also because, as we have noted, all refusal is particular. Refusal understands the wisdom in a story, as well as the wisdom in not passing that story on. Refusal in research makes way for other r-words—for resistance, reclaiming, recovery, reciprocity, repatriation, regeneration. Though understandings of refusal are still emergent, though so much is still coming into view, we want to consolidate a summary of take-away points for our readers. A parting gift, of sorts, as each of us takes our leave to map our next steps as researchers, as community members, within and without academe. We think of this list as a tear-away sheet, something to cut out and carry in your pocket, sew into a prayer flag, or paste into your field notebooks.

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What can be said about refusal in social science research?

- Refusal can be a generative stance for humanized researchers.
- Refusal is not just a “no.”
- Refusal must be situated in a critical understanding of settler colonialism and its regimes of representation (i.e., the disappearance of Indigenous people, the enslavability and murderability of Black people, the right to make interdictions on Othered lives).

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- Refusal makes space for desire and other representational territories, such as making the spectator the spectacle, and turning settler colonial knowledge back on itself.
- Refusal is multidimensional, in dynamic relationship between communities who refuse, the researched who refuse, and the researcher who refuses—or who do not.
- Social science knowledge is settler colonial knowledge. It also refuses (refuses the agency, personhood, and theories of the researched), and it also set limits (limits the epistemologies of the colonized/colonizable/to-be-colonized) and hides its own refusals and limits in order to appear limitless.
- Thus, refusal makes visible the processes of settler colonial knowledge. Refusal, by its very existence and exercise, sets limits on settler colonial knowledge.
- Similarly, refusal denudes power (and power-knowledge) without becoming an advertisement for power.
- Refusal problematizes hidden or implicit theories of change.
- Most efficacious might be the refusal by the researcher, how she determines the limits on what she can ask or what she will write. This refusal might take the form of: turning off the tape recorder; not disclosing what was on the tape even if it was recorded; hearing a story and choosing to listen and learn from it rather than report it; resisting the draw to traffic theories that cast communities as in need of salvation.

Reflective Questions

1. The authors ask the question, “How do we learn from and respect the wisdom and desires in the stories that we (over)hear, while refusing to portray/betray them to the spectacle of the settler colonial gaze?” How might this question be important to the research you are considering, designing, or conducting?
2. In which ways is the stance of refusal in social science research “more than just a ‘no’”? The authors provide several examples of refusal by writers and authors, such as Audra Simpson and Ken Gonzalez-Day. Can you think of other examples of refusal? What do these refusals accomplish? How might the stance of refusal be necessary in your research?
3. The authors assert that “the collection of pain narratives and the theories of change that champion the value of such narratives are so prevalent in the social sciences that one might surmise that they are indeed what the academy is about.” Do you agree with this assertion? Why or why not?
4. The authors ask readers to consider whether there are some forms of knowledge that the academy doesn’t deserve. What is your reaction to this notion? Why do you think you have this reaction?

Notes

1. Another impetus for much of social science research is to document best practices, or effective models, presumably to learn what works in order to transfer onto other spaces, or to scale up. We also question the underlying theory of change in this social science research trope. Is there such a thing as a universal best practice? Can context-specific practices be successfully scaled up? We are not so fast to be sure.
2. This works in much the same way that settler colonialism always seeks to supersede itself, to make itself natural and undetectable (Veracini, 2011).

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3. In their forthcoming chapter, Eve Tuck and Monique Guishard critique the collapsing of ethics to IRB individual-institutional protections, and present an ethical framework of decolonial participatory action research.
4. Upon reading this list, one might complain that these are low-status activities in the academy, activities that, alone, will not lead to tenure or promotion. We do not see tenure or promotion alone as compelling enough reasons to conduct research.

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