



Learning to be refused: exploring refusal, consent and care in storytelling research

May Chazan & Melissa Baldwin

To cite this article: May Chazan & Melissa Baldwin (2020): Learning to be refused: exploring refusal, consent and care in storytelling research, Postcolonial Studies, DOI: [10.1080/13688790.2020.1781324](https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2020.1781324)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2020.1781324>



Published online: 03 Jul 2020.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 59



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Learning to be refused: exploring refusal, consent and care in storytelling research

May Chazan and Melissa Baldwin

Department of Gender and Women's Studies, Lady Eaton College, Trent University, Peterborough, Canada

ABSTRACT

In 2018 in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough, Canada), we invited 17 activists, artists, and academics to share stories of intergenerational memory work – including land-based practices, ceremony, arts, and archiving – as ways of resisting erasure and making change. We grounded this research-generation workshop, *Manifesting Resistance: Intergenerational Memory Work* across 'the Americas', in storytelling from our gathering place, on Michi Saagiig territory; our methods included guided conversations, small group interviews, collaborative media making, and embodied workshops. As two settler researchers on a research team of eight (of different backgrounds, career stages, ancestries, and connections to Turtle Island (North America)), we centred a relational research ethics, drawing from feminist and postcolonial writings on anti-oppressive research and decolonial writings on refusal, relationality, and care. Despite our critical intentions, this research process was ethically complex. Drawing on fieldnotes and recordings, and inspired by scholars like Audra Simpson, we explore two key expressions of research refusal, how and why participants refused this research, and the connections between being refused and gaining consent. We illustrate how these research refusals generated critical knowledges, communities, processes, and spaces, and how negotiating consent in the context of these refusals (by slowing down, listening, and shifting our process) offered important challenges to institutional ethics.

KEYWORDS

Consent; research refusal; decolonial methodologies; relational ethics; indigenous-settler relations

Introduction

Alice Olsen Williams: We are subjects of this research ... and it's okay, as long as you're honest about it ... We just want to have sincere, honest people deal with us. You know? Because we haven't had that.

Monique Mojica, in response: No, they come around measuring our skulls and teeth. That wasn't that long ago.

This paper foregrounds two interrelated expressions of research 'refusal',¹ alluded to in the opening quotations, by older Indigenous women participating in an intergenerational, cross-cultural, digital-storytelling research workshop in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough,

Canada) in 2018. Quilt artist Alice Olsen Williams (Anishinaabe, Trout Lake) and performing artist Monique Mojica (Guna and Rappahannock) were invited into this research to share their creative works on resistant memory (see: www.agingactivisms.org/manifestingresistance). Both are prominent artists with extensive experience in community activisms. The authors' relationships with both storytellers preceded the workshop and persist beyond the research.

Writing as settler researchers of different ages and backgrounds,² we focus on the salient ways in which Alice and Monique refused our research process: how they stalled, redirected or declined certain aspects of it while continuing to consent and participate. Following Audra Simpson and Ruha Benjamin,³ we explore the complex relationships between refusal and consent within research undertaken in a settler-colonial context and amid violent legacies of colonial research.⁴ In doing so, we build on existing scholarship on relational ethics and ongoing consent that seeks to shift understandings of consent-giving in research away from static and regulatory institutional protocols and towards ongoing, relational, contextual and often collective processes.⁵ While scholarship on relational consent has proliferated among Indigenous, feminist and anti-oppressive scholars over the past two decades,⁶ this work has rarely engaged with the negotiation of refusal within consensual relationship-making. Thus, we bring this work into conversation with critical writings on research refusal within postcolonial and settler-colonial studies,⁷ and into dialogue with our reflections on our own research encounters.

Simpson laid the groundwork for thinking through refusal in/as research methodology.⁸ As a Mohawk scholar studying the fragmenting impacts of the imposed Canada–United States border on Mohawk communities whose lands and territories it divides, she theorises refusal at two interrelated stances: first, 'Kahnawà:ke Mohawk refusals of Canadian and U.S. state sovereignty, along with their histories of being refused by both governments'; and second, 'as a political and methodological stance presented as an accounting, a cartography, an analytical strategy, and a writing style'.⁹ In explaining the latter, refusal as a political and methodological stance, Simpson details her own refusal to divulge all knowledge shared with her in her research, choosing to sway from conventional academic research-analysis-publication trajectories to instead hold some stories as sacred, away from the gaze of the settler-colonial academy. Simpson's idea that refusal, as a stance, is not necessarily a full stop, is especially pertinent to understanding refusal–consent connections, and thus to our analysis. As she explains, refusal can be theoretically and methodologically generative – closing down certain pathways, but opening others, and thereby leading to new relationships, subjectivities, communities, politics and knowledges.¹⁰ This notion that a refusal stance is more complex than a simple withdrawal seeds our analysis.

We heed Simpson's calls for a more detailed understanding of the ways in which the 'relationship between refusal and consent [become] the point to needle through and then stitch with'.¹¹ We also attend to Benjamin's call for more sophisticated analyses of the relationships between consent, refusal and care, drawing on her idea of 'informed refusal' as part of building more equitable research relationships:

The potential of refusal not only to negate colonial forms of knowledge production but also to create new, more equitable relationships between researchers, subjects, and the state is vital

... An informed refusal, in other words, is seeded with a vision of what can and should be, and not only a critique of what is.¹²

This article offers an analysis of our attempt to navigate certain complex dynamics of refusal and consent within our research project. This 4-day digital-storytelling workshop involved 17 participants interviewing and photographing each other, participating in circle conversations, and engaging in embodied workshops. In the design, we drew on feminist, decolonial¹³ and queer approaches to storytelling methodology,¹⁴ and on participatory media-making practices.¹⁵ This meant deliberately questioning how power operated within this workshop.¹⁶ Practising ongoing consent throughout, we then undertook this analysis in conversation with both Alice and Monique through thorough post-workshop visits, including incorporating their feedback on early drafts of this paper.¹⁷

While we put much critical intention into this research, the process was riddled with unforeseen tensions, ethical complications and emotional intensity. Alice and Monique trusted in our relationships enough to courageously refuse parts of our research, while choosing not to leave or withdraw from the project. Their refusals responded to ongoing violence: legacies of exploitative research as a tool of colonisation broadly,¹⁸ and specific dynamics of colonial erasure and racism within the project. As Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang express, 'it is a misconception that by simply building participation into a project ... the ethical issues of representation, voice, consumption, and voyeurism are resolved'.¹⁹

We offer this article with humility, as settler researchers still learning to navigate the murky processes of informed refusal and relational consent. We are grateful for what we are learning through our ongoing relationships with Alice and Monique about sowing ethical relationships on colonised Anishinaabe lands.²⁰ We do not, however, feel entitled to learn at the expense of their emotional energy, and we understand that their refusals were not intended to teach us. The stances they took were to protect their own integrity, assert their autonomy and minimise emotional harm.

Research design and process

This was a two-year project (2017–2019), called *Manifesting Resistance: Intergenerational Memory Work across 'the Americas'*.²¹ We carried out our primary research-generation process, the digital-storytelling workshop introduced above, in March 2018, with a dynamic, intergenerational, cross-cultural group of artists, academics and activists. Funded through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, we invited participants to share and record their stories of intergenerational memory work as resisting erasure and activating for change. Conceptually, we sought to intervene in and extend dominant notions of what constitutes an archive,²² centring participants whose memory work is rooted in arts, land-based practices, ceremony and oral history. We documented our process through extensive recordings and note taking.

The project was co-designed and co-directed by principal investigator and co-author May Chazan, who holds an academic position in interdisciplinary gender studies and directs a research programme on storying intergenerational activisms, and co-investigator Gabriela Aceves-Sepúlveda, who has a background in Latin American art history and holds an academic position in media and technology studies. Six additional researcher-

facilitators supported the process, including lead research assistant and co-author Melissa Baldwin, who had recently graduated from an interdisciplinary MA in Canadian Studies and Indigenous Studies. As co-authors, we were two among a team of eight researchers of varied ages, backgrounds, ancestries, and connections to Nogojiwanong and Turtle Island (North America). While we acknowledge the contributions of each researcher and participant, especially the co-leadership of Gabriela and the input offered by Alice and Monique, we take full responsibility for the analysis that follows.

Along with our eight-person research team, we invited nine other participants, all through existing relationships, with a view to including diverse forms of memory work across different contexts. Five among the 17 participants identified as Indigenous to Turtle Island: 3 of our research team, in addition to Alice and Monique. We did not set out to study Indigenous memory work or Indigenous people exclusively. Still, we believe that it is critical to add our voices to those of other researchers grappling with the ethics of doing research on Indigenous lands, negotiating refusals and working to build consensual relationships.²³

As mentioned, the workshop drew on critical methodological approaches,²⁴ questioning how power operates within research, and challenging dominant modes of knowledge production within academia.²⁵ For instance, rather than one researcher carrying out separate private interviews, analysing the ensuing 'data' and remaining in control of who has access to the knowledge produced, our process invited all participants to ask the questions, interview, and receive the stories shared by others, thus co-creating knowledge.²⁶ Relationship-building was also central to this process:²⁷ many participants expressly stated that their decision to participate was connected to knowing and trusting the researcher who invited them. Extensive relationship-building and discussion of our process among the research team preceded the workshop. Moreover, because the project sought to challenge researcher-researched dynamics,²⁸ many in the research team participated as both facilitator and storyteller. For May and Melissa, this workshop was building off three methodologically similar workshops we had facilitated over the two previous years (as part of another ongoing project on storying activism that ran from 2016 to 2020);²⁹ we have also carried the methodological learning from this analysis into our subsequent research workshops.

We opened the workshop with a full day of centring storytelling and memory work from the place in which we gathered – Nogojiwanong, on Michi Saagiig Anishinaabeg territory – inviting additional local guest speakers.³⁰ This offered an opportunity to learn about the territory, Anishinaabek protocols and the resurgent memory work rooted in this place. We moved from this grounding day into two full-group embodied workshops, both led by Indigenous performing artists (of different cultural backgrounds), making space for diverse ways of knowing and story-sharing, and for memory held in bodies, land, space, and ancestral relations. Our intention was to build trust among the group while setting the stage for participants from different contexts to explore such themes in their own work. Given the workshop's themes of erasure and reclamation, we sought to centre Indigenous women's knowledges, practices and memory work throughout. We then invited each participant to tell and record their own story through a combination of full-group circle conversations and smaller-group recording sessions. In the smaller groups, participants (including researchers) interviewed and photographed one another. Following the workshop, research-team members collaborated with each storyteller to

turn their materials into digital stories. Most storytellers chose to have these stories accessible online, while others opted to share their stories privately. Notably, we practised ongoing consent with participants: in addition to a signed institutional consent form at the outset, we checked back at each stage in the project about how to proceed, what to share, and when. Participants all received their own copies of their photographs and interview files. Throughout, we took care by checking in personally with participants; we had a large facilitation team on hand, all of whom were trained in and guided to actively listen to participants and extend multiple forms of care.

As indicated, our analysis centres tensions that, despite intention and design, arose in the workshop. These tensions were rooted in violent legacies of colonial research and in colonial attitudes among certain participants. We homed in on key moments of such friction, recognising these as potentially generative;³¹ we closely revisited our research notes and recordings; and, concurrently, we read widely on ethics, consent and refusal. We then drafted a preliminary analysis and, as described in the introduction, sought out Alice's and Monique's input.

Key concepts: refusal and consent

Our analysis draws together writings on relational consent³² and research refusal,³³ responding to calls for a deeper understanding of the intricacies of navigating refusals when working towards mutual consent. Before we shift to our analysis, it is worthwhile to further explore these conceptual starting points.

Relational ethics and ongoing consent are key themes in decolonial, feminist and anti-oppressive methodological writings.³⁴ Many scholars write about institutional ethics reviews as insufficient for fully addressing the complexities of how power operates through research, citing the ongoing violence researchers and research institutions wage upon Indigenous communities and knowledges globally.³⁵ These researchers articulate relational models of ethics that attend to power dynamics surrounding representation, voice, knowledge and consent.³⁶ Many reimagine consent processes as part of upturning power, shifting from research consent as one-off permission-giving (which is often static, regulatory, linear, extractive, liability-driven and paper-based) towards a process of ongoing dialogue rooted in care (which offers participants frequent opportunities to ask questions about the research, shift their forms of participation, withdraw entirely, or confirm their desire to continue).³⁷ These scholars demand that research ethics boards acknowledge the time, care and resources needed to practise such processes.³⁸ Many also argue for a shift from individual consent models (based on colonial assumptions of individual autonomy) to collective community consent (when appropriate).³⁹ As Rachel Flowers suggests, relational approaches of ongoing consent seek to generate less hungry, less oppressive and less objectifying ways to work together.⁴⁰ Linda Tuhiwai Smith also explains that, 'Consent indicates trust and the assumption is that the trust will not only be reciprocated, but constantly negotiated – a dynamic relationship rather than a static decision'.⁴¹

Despite this proliferation of writing, scholarship on relational consent has rarely engaged with theorising informed and relational refusal as part of *consent* processes.⁴² In a notable exception, Benjamin suggests that participant refusals not only are productive in terms of generating knowledge but also offer powerful opportunities to renegotiate

relational consent. She draws on Simpson's conceptualisation of refusal as not only a 'no' – that is, not a complete withdrawal from the research or the research relationships – but a stance that forecloses some options while generating others.⁴³ Tuck and Yang likewise explain that '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'.⁴⁴ Like Benjamin, we consider how 'informed refusal' might be part of positive consent, and how our research shifted when we became open to such consensual refusal.

Thus, we draw together scholarship on relational consent with critical writings on research refusal, drawing especially on the work of scholars who explore refusals as generative.⁴⁵ Citing Simpson, for instance, Carole McGranahan describes refusals as potentially generating knowledge and community, considering 'how refusal and disengagement structure possibilities, as well as produce subjects, histories, and politics'.⁴⁶ Accordingly, we ask: What might Alice's and Monique's refusals have generated? What might have been generated through negotiations of refusal and consent – what learning, relationships, knowledges, politics, subjectivities, spaces? We also explore, in line with Erica Weiss' work, whether and how their refusals might push back against existing structures (e.g. the institution of academic research or systems of colonial knowledge extraction), seeking to shift or alter them.⁴⁷ Further, we consider the possibility that these refusals might illuminate entirely other options too – more closely resembling what Jill Carter, Karyn Recollet and Dylan Robinson call 'reworlding' – generating alternative ways of being, knowing and relating outside of existing structures.⁴⁸

We recognise that this kind of methodological analysis can easily become defensive and/or self-congratulatory. Instead, we aim to sit with discomfort, returning frequently to these guiding conceptual themes so that we might connect our learning to scholarly conversations.

Being refused

We turn now to the events (and key refusals) of our workshop. After lunch on the second day, we encountered the first expression of refusal. We had just come from participating, as a full group, in an embodied workshop that asked us to delve into the relationships and places that have shaped our resistant memory work. We came together in circle to discuss the technicalities of interviewing, recording, photographing and producing digital stories, in preparation for recording our own stories in small groups.

As we started this session, Alice was visibly poised to share something. A few minutes in, she asked a tentative question: 'All this time, I'm wondering: what is the purpose of this? ... What's in it for us? And then, what's in it for you?' She explained that she did not fully understand what we were doing together, why we had asked her to be part of the workshop and, most importantly, who was going to benefit from this.

A moment of silence followed. We knew that we had, as per our institutional ethics protocol, gone through the details of the project with all participants in advance; we had gone over these details orally with Alice, and she had signed a consent form. We also understood that it took trust for her to intervene in this way, that her question likely indicated tense feelings around the circle, and that we needed to meet her question with honesty, transparency and care. This was not a case where we, the researchers, would check in

at an obvious transition point in the project to ask for ongoing consent (as we did, for instance, when turning audiovisual materials from the workshops into digital stories, and then again before sharing these stories online). This was a moment in which Alice unexpectedly stopped the research from proceeding. It became clear that this was a moment to revisit our objectives within the circle – not privately off to the side, or in formal ‘consent form’ language. In retrospect, we realise that it would have been useful to incorporate a collective discussion of consent at the outset of the project, given our collective knowledge-generation methods. While May offered some words in response, Alice continued to ask for clarification about the motivations, benefits and funding of this project. It was clear to us that, in a spirit of relational ethics, the workshop could not move forward until we collectively undertook a more thorough process of informed consent.

May then shared:

This is a good reminder that consent can never be a one-off thing that we send out and sign. We need to remind each other, and come back to why we’re here and what we’re doing together. It’s never, in any context, okay to just assume that somebody has read and understood something without talking it through in that relationship.

Alice’s questioning offered an opportunity to discuss this belief and practice openly with the group, extending our practices, and generating knowledge about how to better build consenting relationships.

Initiated by Alice and Monique, the group then discussed the history of researchers exploiting and deceiving Indigenous communities, the falsity of benevolent-settler narratives, and the resulting wariness of research that purports to benefit participants.⁴⁹ May explained her thinking behind the research design and her hopes for what might emerge from the process. For example, she hoped that participants might gain something from the relationships built through this project, from sharing and receiving within the group, and from recording their stories. Importantly, Alice replied by asking May to account directly for how this research would benefit the researchers’ careers, saying, ‘Do you have a vested interest in this?’ She pointed out that participants were giving four days of their time, and she wondered about reciprocity. There was uncertainty as to how we should proceed in this tense moment.

As other participants engaged with Alice in this conversation, several important dynamics were revealed. First, her refusal to move into recording without openly exploring consent created a space to build and articulate certain supports and solidarities among the group. This was particularly evident among the five Indigenous women around the circle. While the other four said that they were clear about the process and its purpose, all were unwavering and vocal in their solidarity with Alice, and about the importance of taking this time together. These shows of support contrasted with the remarks of two other non-Indigenous participants, whose comments were dismissive of Alice’s intervention, implying that it was inconvenient to the project. Monique was the first and most vocal in her support of Alice, her words offering context to what was playing out: ‘We come from the context of being the studied, being the Other. That’s what I think ... you’re responding to’. When Alice agreed, Monique went on to say that, while she understood the research process, she also felt the need to revisit consent:

The historical practice of being Othered: ... in traditional, conventional research, it's the researcher who then takes that information back and has the power, by virtue of their academic credentials, to interpret that. So, what I understood is that [the researchers are] trying to disrupt, interrupt, change up that power ... but the revisiting of consent being an ongoing thing, the question of what's in it for us, is resonating with me this afternoon as we're sitting in discomfort ... I mean we are, for all intents and purposes, the subjects of your research. What's the reciprocity?

This conversation also revealed a second dynamic around the discomfort Monique described: part of the reason Alice's refusal was so deeply resonant with other Indigenous participants was that complex dynamics had been building within the workshop over the previous day and half. By the middle of the second day, it was clear that our decision to centre Indigenous women's knowledges and incorporate local protocols, ceremony and reclamation of memory in our methodology was extremely uncomfortable for some participants. Tensions had been mounting from our first moments together, as was evident throughout our research team's notes, and as was clearly confirmed for us in our post-workshop discussions with Monique. In other words, while Alice might have offered this intervention regardless, Monique's response was connected to colonial and racist attitudes operating within the workshop. At least one participant was making repeated comments that were received as colonial, racist and disrespectful (as well as classist and ableist).⁵⁰ Moreover, as facilitators, we had yet to effectively communicate with the group in a way that would stop these comments and behaviours. Monique later explained to us that, by the time of her refusal, she and others had fielded almost two days of objectifying dynamics. She had initially fully consented to share stories, ceremony and artistic memory practices with a small group of people whom she had expected to trust, but by day two she needed to 'revisit and revise [her] consent given the dynamic'.

The refusals effectively turned discomfort back on us, the researchers, inviting us into uncertainty, and asking us to account for what we were asking of participants, why we were asking for it, and who would benefit. Through this intervention, Alice and Monique also staked out their own autonomy and integrity within this process, and reminded us that their consent was contingent.

We shifted our plan and engaged this conversation slowly and carefully until Alice and the group as a collective were ready to proceed with the day. The discussion lasted just over an hour amid a highly condensed programme that was already running over time. We delayed moving into our recording groups, knowing that this would alter what would be recorded. Toward the end, Alice addressed the time taken:

I'm feeling kind of, like, guilty for taking time. You know, time is so important and we make plans about time, and here I am bringing up this stuff and we should be in our little groups talking or interviewing or whatever. So, you're never given the time to talk about these things.

This opened space for participants to voice impatience with Alice's intervention or to support her. Most vocally, Michelle Lorna Nahanee, a Squamish community organiser, experienced facilitator, and member of the research team, responded by making a connection between colonial capitalist patriarchy and the pressure on time: 'Taking this time is part of this resistance', she assured the group. The rest of the research team concurred.

By the end of the conversation, Alice expressed her readiness to move forward and reaffirmed her consent. She said that if she had understood the project the way she did

now, she ‘would have been [t]here a hundred times’. As we moved into our small groups, Alice consented to be the first one interviewed. Her relationship with Michelle grew and developed. While colonial dynamics continued,⁵¹ most members of the group practised support and care (such as tea-making) for Alice, who showed up meaningfully and consistently for her group.

At the end of the third day, when all recording sessions were completed, we gathered once again as a full group, with each person reflecting on what they had learned during the recording process. When she received the microphone, Alice said: ‘I feel like I learned a *lot*. Just for myself. Not for ... *research*. Not for, maybe, papers, but just for myself. And I say *miigwech* [thank you] for that’. This statement came across as a continuation of her refusal to be objectified in any way, a refusal to let all of her knowledge become research, as well as a moment of consent, gratitude and reclamation. Hers was one of the first digital stories created following the workshop, and she consented immediately to having it online, noting that this kind of resource could save her from having to physically go into settler spaces to talk about her work (view her story here: <https://vimeo.com/284242430>).

Much was generated from Alice’s courage to slow down our process and revisit her consent. We return to a discussion of what was generated in the next sections. As we listened back to the discussions, though, we recognised that the space we were facilitating was still problematic. We never effectively stopped ongoing assertions of dismissal, impatience and superiority that were present in our recordings, even as we addressed Alice’s concerns.

We turn now to Monique’s interrelated refusal. To understand this, we need to retrace some of what happened elsewhere in the workshop, beginning immediately following that first conversation on consent and colonial research legacies, when we moved into the small recording groups.

May, as facilitator of Monique’s recording group, led the smaller group to our recording room. Once all were together in a smaller circle, she asked how people were feeling and how we wanted to proceed. Monique responded that she felt a combination of exhaustion from ongoing colonial violence in the world, and anger at having to confront these dynamics within the workshop space. She detailed several further aggressions she had endured over the two days, including comments in bathrooms, hotel elevators and hallways. She articulated disappointment with May for not effectively shutting down this dynamic.⁵² Each of the six people in the room took turns speaking about the tensions, and each listened carefully. This was a slow, uncomfortable process of airing truths and acknowledging hurt. Monique, who was scheduled to be interviewed first, was clear that she would not record anything that day, and that perhaps she would not record at all; but she chose to stay. Her refusal gave the group an opportunity to listen more deeply and speak more honestly about what was happening.

The group decided not to record at all that day; each person expressed in their own way that extracting stories in this context of discomfort was neither ethical nor in keeping with the goals of the project. None of us consented to interview or to be interviewed in that moment. We understood this to be further pushing our group behind schedule, with potential implications for what we would ultimately have time to record, but Monique created a space for our collective informed refusal – we knew that the research process needed to be interrupted. May asked: what do we need to do together to make this space better? Monique then requested a group smudge [a spiritual cleansing practice].

This off-record time required much emotional work and care, but group members felt that this was necessary for our mutual consent and relationship-building.

By the second evening, it was unclear whether Monique would come back the following day, and whether she would want to record her story as part of the project. May understood that if Monique returned the following morning, we would need to minimise time together in the full-group circle in order to avoid further aggressions. That evening, by text message, May and Monique explored options for Monique to record her story elsewhere, or at another time, or not at all – again practising an ongoing process of consent. In the event that Monique would decide to return to the workshop, May also made plans to reconfigure the programme for the next day, cutting out many of the full-group sessions and finding other ways to stay accountable to the process without subjecting Monique to further harm.

The next morning, Monique did return. As she passed through the larger group room, Jenn Cole, a mixed-ancestry Anishinaabe member of the research team who was also part of Monique's recording group, offered her a smudge as another act of solidarity and support. Upon entering the recording room, Monique told the group that her participation was contingent on not going back into the full group and not being recorded first, as per the original schedule. We then collectively chose who would interview, be interviewed, and photograph, generating a more collaborative, care-centred approach to the work (different from the other groups and the workshop design, in which roles were pre-assigned). With each interview Monique became more present in the group and engaged with the stories; she went from sitting silently off to the side during the first interview to joining the circle, offering comments and supporting other storytellers. The relationships in the room also became increasingly intense with time; the interviews, slightly awkward at first, became vulnerable, honest, intricately intertwined one to the next, and much deeper than many storytellers had anticipated, as several participants later expressed in our group debrief.

Monique's story was recorded last and was preceded by another lengthy discussion of consent; May again offered several alternatives to recording her story in that moment. Despite the ongoing tensions, Monique opted to record her story, and she did so with grace and dynamism (view her story here: <https://vimeo.com/309525854>).

At lunch and breaks, several group members and project facilitators provided acts of care akin to the continuous tea-making in Alice's room: bringing Monique food and keeping her company so that she would not need to venture out from the space. In that day's closing circle, in which all participants were to come back together, Jenn quietly remained back with Monique. Jenn later expressed that she felt that Monique should not be off to the side by herself while those who were causing harm were allowed to take up space in the circle.

Monique's refusal both cut off relationships (with the large group) and generated and deepened ways of relating (in the small group). In a two-hour debrief within the small group the following morning, Monique described the space that the group had created:

This little space has been an oasis for me in what has been a violent, chaotic confrontation ... This is the only safe space that we've been able to carve out. And that's about bodies. And that's about space. And that's about land ... We smudged. We claimed space. We made it ours ... But I was really aware ... of the boundaries of this room. It's like, here I'm all right. I have a hard time getting comfortable, how to sit and that. But also aware of the

fear of the door opening and who's going to come in ... What's coming in from the rest ... There's an acuteness to that feeling ... versus the safety: the threat, I feel that.

What became evident was a direct association between Monique's refusal and the generation of relationships, space, and the knowledge produced. As Jenn expressed to the group in this same debrief, there was a sense that 'tethers' had been generated among us:

I feel like we're tethering to one another in different ways. I can feel ... heavy and intentional cords between us. Also, this kind of side-by-side feeling: like this kind of shoulder to shoulder to shoulder, the circle and our places in it ... We've also done really hard work in this room, like the work of trying to figure out how to move forward, and we all brought ourselves, I think, to that work sincerely. Scared of it, curious about it, willing, unwilling. And there's been so much negotiation ... really glad we took the time to try to figure out how we're all feeling. That was really hard though.

These comments about the room and its relationships were framed in the context of Monique's refusal. In the intimacy fuelled by this refusal, care became necessary, and vulnerability became possible.

This intimacy and vulnerability also shaped the generation of new knowledge about participants' own stories, practices and memory work. Upon telling her story in this group, one participant, also a performing artist, reflected on how her sense of safety generated new knowledge and understanding in her telling: 'It felt really ... warm, and safe. In this space I felt really supported by everyone, and that was really necessary for me. And I felt like I came to some new understanding about what I'm doing'. The group also produced knowledge around the research process, again connected to Monique's honesty. We placed importance on flexibility, slowing down, checking in about how we were feeling, and establishing consent at each point along the way. We discussed whether it might work better for an external facilitator to be available to respond to potential aggressions, and to have counselling support. We talked about when and how local protocols were, and were not, followed. We talked about the work we might have done in advance with certain participants, had we known what their views and attitudes would be. We considered whether we needed more time early on to establish why we were each there and what each person brought to the work. We considered different ways of group contracting (setting expectations around what is and is not permitted within the group, with protocols for how to respond in the event of transgressions) at the outset. The learning was immense, and we credit much of it to Monique's commitment to refusing parts of the process while staying in relationship with us. We have since carried forward many of these concrete suggestions and new knowledges into our subsequent projects.⁵³

At the same time, Monique reminded us that sometimes, regardless of the design of a project or the work done in advance, certain people enter spaces with attitudes or agendas that impact all who engage with them:

I don't believe that the way things were set up precipitated anti-Indigenous violence, but rather that that arrived with the people who enacted it, because it came out in that first dinner. But there needed to be protocols for stopping it.

Finally, Monique's decision not to re-enter the full group generated a productive discomfort that rippled through the full workshop: what was generated in our smaller group had effects more widely. May said in the debrief conversation:

My relationships in this room informed how I could and couldn't relate in other parts of the workshop. Like that tether didn't go away for me actually when I left this room. I was aware of, for instance, Monique being in this room in the times when I had to go and be in other spaces ... The memory of this space was carrying over into other parts of my experience.

Other participants offered similar expressions, and it was clear that Monique's absence from the larger group, and the tethers carried into the larger space, generated an ongoing awareness of the tense dynamics of the workshop.

In the weeks following the workshop, May debriefed with Monique as she did with Alice, and she opened up an invitation to remain in relationship. Eight months later, Monique consented to sharing her digital story online. This time allowed for ongoing revisiting of what was shared, and the context of the storytelling.

Discussion

We return now to the conceptual themes we introduced earlier: our questions about what it means to be refused, and how we might navigate refusal stances and consensual relationship-building as settler researchers. Throughout this project, Alice and Monique both hinged their consent to participate on what Flowers suggests was our 'willingness' to be refused,⁵⁴ and to take seriously their refusals. Perhaps this language of 'willingness' makes it sound too straightforward, or as though there is some particular way of acting to ensure that research can and should proceed regardless of what is being refused and why.⁵⁵ This was not our experience. The relationships between refusal and consent were murky, uncertain and emotionally intense for many involved. This process required turning inward to examine our own fears of failure, settler guilt, inadequacy and impulses to avoid culpability.⁵⁶ More importantly, it required moving away from wallowing in these feelings in order to take a stance – one that prioritised our care for these relationships over gaining permission to 'move forward' or continuing with 'business as usual'.⁵⁷ Caring – through listening, making tea, exposing our weaknesses and so on – came with an understanding that who/how we are in the microcosm of this research-world matters for how we engage beyond it.

These processes required time – a precious commodity in the neoliberal university – listening, flexibility, changing, learning, humility. None of these are supported within the powerful forces of capitalism, colonialism and heteropatriarchy – forces that remain fused with the institution of the academy.⁵⁸ Indeed, time acted as a site of friction between the quantifiable outputs and values of productivity, and the creative processes of building trust, connection, care and self-awareness, which are the foundation of practising ethical, reciprocal consent. These processes also required the willingness and courage of Alice and Monique to undertake the difficult, risky work of refusing.

Three key conceptual points are worth revisiting in this discussion, the first being the complex connections between refusal and consent. Participants' refusals nudged us to practise ongoing consent more fully and more critically, though still imperfectly. We have come to better understand that consent cannot be meaningfully given outside of and before the proceedings of research; as researchers, we need to engage in conversations about consent in private one-on-one discussion *and* collectively in community.⁵⁹ We needed to work through consent with Alice in the full-group discussion, while for Monique, this process involved multiple discussions within the smaller recording group, by text message, and long after the workshop ended. The refusals demanded

that we fully expose discomfort, uncertainty, our roles in engineering the research process, and how our work is and is not connected to violent legacies of exploitative knowledge extraction.⁶⁰ They required us to acknowledge openly to Alice our own vested interests, and to Monique that her experiences of being objectified and dismissed by certain participants were real and unacceptable. Part of this acknowledgement was taking responsibility for the dynamics that unfolded; part of it was being willing to see ourselves as settlers complicit in a system that is predicated on extracting knowledge (as well as resources and labour) from Indigenous communities;⁶¹ and part of it was being willing to admit our own self-interest, missteps, limitations and not knowing. We recognise that such admissions do not preclude a reciprocal research process; rather, they are essential to practising reciprocity. Navigating these pathways required us to move beyond acknowledging to acting – slowing down, changing our plan, altering the workshop structure, and making space to build relationships in a good way. It required our willingness to put process ahead of product. Taking action also meant stopping the aggressions taking place, a challenge we never effectively met. The central contribution of this article is thus our unpacking of this refusal–consent dynamic – a detailed exploration of the place for expressions of refusal within consensual research relationships.

Secondly, these refusal stances were not just a clear stop or ‘no’ but also generative of relationships, spaces and knowledges.⁶² They generated a series of tethers, among Indigenous participants, broadly, and among Monique’s recording-group members. They made, unmade and remade certain spaces. Alice’s intervention reshaped the limits of the large-circle conversations thereafter, in ways that made that space more accountable and supportive for some, while simultaneously scarier, less restrained and more divisive for others. Meanwhile, Monique’s refusal to re-enter the large group helped grow a space of safety and intimacy in the recording room, in contrast to the threat of what lurked outside. Alice’s and Monique’s refusals and ongoing consent processes further generated tremendous knowledge about our methodology, which carried over to the subsequent project and shaped the stories produced. For instance, the two refusal stances we detail in this article significantly extended and shifted our understanding of how violent and extractive colonial dynamics imbue even critical and care-oriented methodologies, and what it means to practise ongoing consent amid such dynamics. This led to much more extensive reshaping of the research than we would have anticipated, creating slower, deeper ways of engaging with one another; reshaping our structures, processes and schedules; and challenging us to an ongoing practice of uncertainty. In subsequent workshops it also resulted in our working directly with counsellors to support us and our participants to create safer and more accountable spaces, practise explicit group consent processes, and focus our work within localised communities where there is some existing accountability among participants. In addition to these methodological insights, the refusal stances we have detailed – and the intimacies and vulnerabilities resulting from building slower, consensual relationships – shaped the stories shared by participants. This deeply reflective sharing has ultimately informed the knowledge we have co-created on memory, sovereignty and resistance within this project.⁶³

Thirdly, and relatedly, these refusals offer insights into the relationships between refusal and change.⁶⁴ Did these refusals (and our working towards consent) generate change, and if so, how? Did they alter power dynamics or shift the colonial/academic gaze? Did they alter, challenge and/or create new structures? While we would not claim that any kind of capital-T transformation took place, we witnessed hints of change, noting the different ways these

processes operated for Alice and Monique. For instance, Alice's refusal pushed back against the norms of academic research, especially one-off written permission-giving, requiring a slower, more consensual, relational, collective and transparent structure. She moved back into the existing programme with more confidence, while continuing to refuse objectification; she refused to engage in conversations steeped in colonial dynamics, and instead worked towards building relationships, upholding her integrity and autonomy as an Anishinaabe woman. In her refusal, she seemed to both resist and reclaim the process and structure. Monique's refusal, by contrast, appeared to generate a kind of alternative structure – one that (at least for her) did not remain connected to the wider project, the programme we had set out or the colonial dynamics at play. In this way, her refusal seemed to work like what Carter et al. term a 'reworlding' process.⁶⁵ Through her refusal to re-engage with the structure as set out, she made possible intense care, solidarity and tethering within her smaller group. This was not necessarily an easy space, nor a structure free from power dynamics, but it was at least partly sovereign from the larger project.

Conclusions

While made necessary by violent legacies and ongoing colonial dynamics, Alice's and Monique's refusals (re)shaped and nuanced how this project proceeded, in what we believe were good ways. We learned from their words and actions, and this led us to amend our research process to be ever more accountable, ethical and caring.⁶⁶ This is significant in the era of the neoliberal university, where pressures towards productivity, output and avoiding liability often preclude flexibility, relationship and care.⁶⁷ We return to our belief that we were not entitled to this learning at the expense of the emotional energy of these two women. We take their relationships and their refusals as generous and courageous, supporting us (perhaps inadvertently) to become better researchers and better humans.

Our analysis highlights a need for research ethics to not simply go beyond one-off, informed permission-giving but also to engage meaningfully with refusal stances.⁶⁸ To do this, we need to commit to ongoing, slower consent processes. Such processes are made more ethical and generative through the uncertainty and discomfort of refusal. Given the ongoing colonial violence and knowledge extraction at play across the globe, there are clearly times when refusal means a clear 'no' or 'stop' – or perhaps 'you should never have been here to begin with'. We have also come to appreciate that some refusal stances in critical research, particularly when they are enacted within ongoing relationships between research subjects and researchers, might also open possibilities for knowledge generation that ruptures power and reworlds relations.⁶⁹

We intend this analysis to speak to the difficult but important work of being refused (particularly for settler researchers), without running away, disengaging, or silencing refusing voices. We have learned that those who offered refusals in our project were in fact deeply and critically engaged in the process, offering important vision and integrity in thinking about what that process could be. We believe that this matters for research and researchers – especially for those of us aspiring to engage in work that is less oppressive and more human.⁷⁰ We believe that this discussion offers a timely lesson for settlers, and to the settler state more broadly, in terms of learning how to be refused (especially within Indigenous–non-Indigenous relationships), and then how to stop, slow down and reconsider, practising a consensual wayfinding together.

Notes

1. Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014, pp 95–97.
2. May Chazan writes from the position of a person of Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry, and thus someone who holds all the privileges of a white settler on Turtle Island; she is also a university professor, parent, and cisgender woman who is (currently) able bodied. Melissa Baldwin writes from the position of a younger, casually-employed, queer and gender queer person of Scottish/French/English white settler background, and as someone who is also (temporarily) able bodied. We are both engaged in ongoing questioning and learning about how our positions influence this work, these relationships and our analyses.
3. Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*; Ruha Benjamin, 'Informed Refusal: Toward a Justice-Based Bioethics', *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 41(6), 2016, pp 967–90.
4. Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*; Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd edition, London: Zed Books, 2012.
5. Fay Fletcher, Lola Baydala, Liz Letendre, Lia Rutton, Stephanie Wornell, Sherry Letendre and Tanja Schraumm, "No Lone Person": The Ethics Consent Process as an Ethical Dilemma in Carrying Out Community-Based Participatory Research with a First Nations Community', *Pimatisiwin* 9(2), 2011, pp 323–348; Kakali Bhattacharya, 'Consenting to the Consent Form: What Are the Fixed and Fluid Understandings Between the Researcher and the Researched?', *Qualitative Inquiry* 13(8), 2007, pp 1095–1115.
6. Catriona Mackenzie, Christopher McDowell and Eileen Pittaway, 'Beyond "Do No Harm": The Challenge of Constructing Ethical Relationships in Refugee Research', *Journal of Refugee Studies* 20(2), 2007; Julie R Bull, 'Research with Aboriginal Peoples: Authentic Relationships as a Precursor to Ethical Research', *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics* 2010, pp 13–22; Colleen Reid and Elaine Brief, 'Confronting Condescending Ethics: How Community-based Research Challenges Traditional Approaches to Consent, Confidentiality, and Capacity', *Journal of Academic Ethics* 7, 2009, pp 75–85.
7. Dorcas M Kamuya, Sally J Theobald, Vicki Marsh, Michael Parker, Wenzel P Geissler and Sassy C Molyneux, "The One Who Chases You Away Does Not Tell You Go": Silent Refusals and Complex Power Relations in Research Consent Processes in Coastal Kenya', *PLoS One* 10 (5), 2015; Rachel Flowers, 'Refusal to Forgive: Indigenous Women's Love and Rage', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 4(2), 2015, p 34; Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*; Benjamin, 'Informed Refusal'.
8. Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*.
9. Carole McGranahan, 'Theorizing Refusal: An Introduction', *Cultural Anthropology* 31(3), 2014, p 321.
10. Audra Simpson, 'Consent's Revenge', *Cultural Anthropology* 31(3), 2014, pp 326–333.
11. Simpson, 'Consent's Revenge', p 328.
12. Benjamin, 'Informed Refusal', p 970.
13. According to some scholars, *decolonising* methodologies confront past and ongoing research that objectifies Indigenous peoples, recognising colonial/Western epistemological dominance in research institutions globally. They articulate and practise research with, by and for Indigenous peoples (e.g. Clare Land, *Decolonizing Solidarity: Dilemmas and Directions for Supporters of Indigenous Struggles*, London: Zed Books, 2015). We root our work in decolonial *approaches* (e.g. Fletcher et al, 'No Lone Person'), which, in our context, have more conceptual appeal, and which are widely used to refer to critiquing colonial methods, epistemologies and ethical practices, without suggesting that research alone without material return of land (particularly within still-colonial institutions) has the power to decolonise (see Eve Tuck and K Wayne Yang, 'Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, & Society* 1(1), pp 1–40). We take the work of decolonising to be ongoing and multifaceted, including a shift towards decolonial epistemologies and requiring a material shift in land control and power.

14. Jill Carter, Karyn Recollet and Dylan Robinson, 'Interventions into the Maw of Old World Hunger: Frog Monsters, Kinstellatory Maps, and Radical Relationalities in a Project of Reworlding', in Heather Davis-Fisch (ed), *Canadian Performance Histories and Historiographies*, Toronto, ON: Playwrights Canada Press, 2018, pp 205–231; Susy J Zepeda, 'Queer Xicana Indígena Cultural Production: Remembering Through Oral and Visual Storytelling', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, & Society* 3, 2014, pp 119–141; Carla Rice, Andrea LaMarre, Nadine Changfoot and Patty Douglas, 'Making spaces: multimedia storytelling as reflexive, creative praxis', *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 2018.
15. Rice et al., 'Making spaces'; Yoko Akame, Debra Evans, Seth Keen, Faye McMillan, Mark McMillan and Peter West, 'Designing Digital and Creative Scaffolds to Strengthen Indigenous Nations: Being Wiradjuri by Practising Sovereignty', *Digital Creativity* 28(1), 2017, pp 58–72.
16. E.g. Eve Tuck and K Wayne Yang, 'Unbecoming Claims: Pedagogies of Refusal in Qualitative Research', *Qualitative Inquiry* 20(6), 2014, pp 811–818.
17. In writing this article, we asked both storytellers some critical, though potentially uncomfortable, questions: how they feel about us (as settlers) writing this paper; whether this analysis belongs in academic journals; and whether (and which parts of) our analysis does or does not reflect their own. Both expressed feeling validated by our analysis, which did not dismiss them or their actions as 'inconvenient' or 'irrational' (see Flowers, 'Refusal to Forgive'). Monique remarked that the way we exposed how power operated within our research was 'refreshing', unexpected, and critical for accountability. Both storytellers consented to academic publication. We identify both storytellers by name, with consent, in order to credit them, and we link their knowledge directly to their recorded stories and to their work as artists. We did not co-author with the storytellers as they had already given of themselves tremendously, and they clearly viewed their core work to be their arts practices, not writing about this experience.
18. E.g. Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*.
19. Eve Tuck and K Wayne Yang, 'R-words: Refusing Research', in *Humanizing Research: Decolonizing Qualitative Inquiry with Youth and Communities*, 2011, p 230.
20. E.g. Sabra Thorner, Fran Edmonds, Maree Clarke and Paola Balla, 'Maree's Backyard: Intercultural Collaborations for Indigenous Sovereignty in Melbourne', *Oceana* 88(3), 2018, pp 269–91.
21. We understand 'the Americas' as a geographical demarcation constructed through colonialism: we use this imperfect language to acknowledge that participants hailed from across Turtle Island (North America) and beyond, including from locations outside of the often singular, homogenous, US-centric conception of 'America' and indeed outside of the 'Global North'.
22. E.g. Zepeda, 'Queer Xicana Indígena'.
23. E.g. Flowers, 'Refusal to Forgive'; Fletcher et al, 'No Lone Person'; Bhattacharya, 'Consenting'.
24. Carter et al, 'Interventions'; Zepeda, 'Queer Xicana Indígena'; Rice et al, 'Making Spaces'.
25. E.g. Tuck and Yang, 'Unbecoming Claims'.
26. E.g. Thorner et al, 'Maree's Backyard'; Martin and Mirraaboo, 'Ways of Knowing'.
27. E.g. Mackenzie et al, 'Beyond "Do No Harm"'.
28. E.g. Bhattacharya, 'Consenting'.
29. May Chazan and Maddy Macnab, 'Doing the Feminist Intergenerational Mic: Digital Storytelling Methodology as Social Change Praxis', *FORUM: Qualitative Social Research* 19(2), 2018.
30. We have both lived in Nogojiwanong as uninvited guests on the territory of the Michi Saagiig Anishinaabeg since 2013, when we both came here to take up jobs at Trent University, and it is from this place that we offer the analysis in this article. Nogojiwanong in Anishinaabemowin means 'the place at the foot of the rapids'. This is the original name for the region that contains the mid-sized city of Peterborough, Canada, 150 kilometres northeast of the major urban centre of Toronto. This territory is governed by colonial treaties (Treaty 20 and the Williams Treaties), which have been repeatedly violated by settler (non-Indigenous)

- individuals, corporations, and governments. See: Gidigaa Migizi (Williams, Doug) (Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake, ed), *Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg: This Is Our Territory*, Winnipeg, MB: ARP Books, 2018; Taylor, Anne and Melissa Dokis (dirs), *OSHKIGMONG: A Place Where I Belong* [DVD], 2015, Curve Lake First Nation.
31. Anna L Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.
 32. Carolyn Ellis, 'Compassionate Research: Interviewing and Storytelling from a Relational Ethics of Care', in Ivor Goodson, Ari Antikainen, Pat Sikes and Molly Andrews (eds), *The Routledge International Handbook on Narrative and Life History*, London: Routledge, 2017, pp 431–445; Bhattacharya, 'Consenting'; Mackenzie et al, 'Beyond "Do No Harm"'; Fletcher et al, 'No Lone Person'.
 33. E.g. Simpson, 'Ruse of Consent'; Tuck and Yang, 'Unbecoming Claims'; Benjamin, 'Informed Refusal'; Kamuya et al, 'Silent Refusals'.
 34. Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*; Land, *Decolonizing Solidarity*; Karen Martin and Booran Mirraoopaa, 'Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing: A Theoretical Framework and Methods for Indigenous and Indigenist Re-search', *Journal of Australian Studies* 27 (76), 2003, pp 203–214.
 35. Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*.
 36. Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*.
 37. Fletcher et al, 'No Lone Person'; Tuck and Yang, 'R-words'.
 38. Fletcher et al, 'No Lone Person'.
 39. Fletcher et al, 'No Lone Person', p 326.
 40. Flowers, 'Refusal to Forgive'.
 41. Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, p 136.
 42. Benjamin, 'Informed Refusal'; Kamuya et al, 'Silent Refusals'.
 43. Simpson, 'On Ethnographic Refusal'.
 44. See Tuck and Yang, 'R-words', p 225; Simpson, 'On Ethnographic Refusal'. Unlike these scholars, we do not focus on our own refusals. Rather, we explore the content and context of participants' refusals of us and our process, our imperfect attempts to embrace these refusals, our mutual work to remain in relationship, and our processes of making consensual pathways together. We position this analysis, in part, as a response to Flowers, who asserts: 'As Indigenous peoples increasingly take up the politics of refusal ... the settler too must demonstrate a willingness to be refused' (Flowers, 'Refusal to Forgive').
 45. McGranahan, 'Theorizing Refusal'; Simpson, *Consent's Revenge*.
 46. McGranahan, 'Theorizing Refusal', p 321.
 47. E.g. Erica Weiss, 'Refusal as Act, Refusal as Abstention', *Cultural Anthropology* 31(3), 2014, pp 351–358.
 48. Carter et al, 'Interventions'; Martin and Mirraoopaa, 'Ways of Knowing'.
 49. E.g. Reid and Brief, 'Confronting Condescending Ethics'.
 50. Reviewing recordings of group discussions and researchers' field notes, we can trace the continuous probing of Indigenous participants and researchers by a few participants. These repeated remarks, while perhaps not intending to cause harm, had the effect of undermining the legitimacy of Indigenous nationhood and sovereignty, ignoring connections between Indigenous resurgence and memory practices, dismissing lived colonial experiences, and attempting to erase ongoing colonial dynamics across 'the Americas'. Researchers also noted that the comments and body language of at least one participant felt disrespectful of local territorial protocols and ceremonial practices.
 51. In later discussions, Alice said that she did not remember the colonial dynamics continuing into the recording rooms. However, recordings from this room turned up numerous instances where Alice was subjected to what we consider inappropriate or denigrating probing about her beliefs and practices.
 52. May, Melissa, and others on the research team attempted to shift the colonial dynamic within the workshop but were ultimately unable to, in part because of widely different perspectives

among the research team about what was taking place and the best way to respond. The details of these dynamics are beyond the scope of this paper.

53. For example, we incorporated the following methodological shifts into subsequent workshops: (1) having a counsellor on hand for active listening, identifying microaggressions and potential for harm; (2) making time for accountability planning; (3) shifting back to working exclusively with participants who reside in Nogojiwanong, in order to work within relationships that extend beyond the research.
54. Flowers, 'Refusal to Forgive'.
55. Benjamin, 'Informed Refusal'.
56. E.g. Land, *Decolonizing Solidarity*.
57. Ellis, 'Compassionate Research'; Bhattacharya, 'Consenting'.
58. Eli Meyerhoff and Elsa Noterman, 'Revolutionary Scholarship by Any Means Necessary: Slow or Fast but for the End of this World', *ACME* 18(1), pp 217–245.
59. Resonating with Tuck and Yang, 'R-words'; Fletcher et al, 'No Lone Person'.
60. Simpson, 'Ethnographic Refusal'.
61. Thorner et al, 'Maree's Backyard'; Martin and Mirraboopa, 'Ways of Knowing'.
62. McGranahan, 'Theorizing Refusal'.
63. See Chazan and Cole, 'Making Memory Sovereign'.
64. Flowers, 'Refusal to Forgive'.
65. Carter et al, 'Interventions'.
66. Ellis, 'Compassionate Research'; Bhattacharya, 'Consenting'.
67. Benjamin, 'Informed Refusal'; Meyerhoff and Noterman, 'Revolutionary Scholarship'.
68. Kamuya et al, 'Silent Refusals'; Benjamin, 'Informed Refusal'.
69. Carter et al, 'Interventions'.
70. Bhattacharya, 'Consenting'; Reid and Brief, 'Confronting Condescending Ethics'.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

Social Sciences Research Council of Canada Insight Development Grant File 24749 and Canada Research Chair funding file 25882.

Notes on contributors

May Chazan gratefully lives in Michi Saagiig Anishinaabeg territory (Peterborough, Canada), where she holds the position of Canada Research Chair in Gender and Feminist Studies at Trent University. Through creative storytelling methodologies, her research explores why and how activists of different backgrounds, genders, abilities, and generations work for change, and how they narrate, circulate, and archive their own stories. She is the author of *The Grandmothers' Movement: Solidarity and Survival in the Time of AIDS* (2015), and co-editor of *Unsettling Activisms: Critical Interventions on Gender, Aging, and Social Change* (2018) and *Home and Native Land: Unsettling Multiculturalism in Canada* (2011).

Melissa Baldwin (they/them) is a queer and genderqueer researcher, activist, and carer of children and dogs. As a white settler, with ancestry from Scotland, France, Ireland, and England, Melissa is grateful to be living in Michi Saagiig Anishinaabe territory, and to be nourished by this land, and to learn from Anishinaabe people about these relationships and responsibilities. Melissa co-chairs Aging Activisms (www.agingactivisms.org).