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Ethics, Anonymity, and Authorship in Community Centred Research or Anonymity and the Island Cache

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ETHICS, ANONYMITY, AND AUTHORSHIP IN COMMUNITY CENTRED RESEARCH OR ANONYMITY AND THE ISLAND CACHE

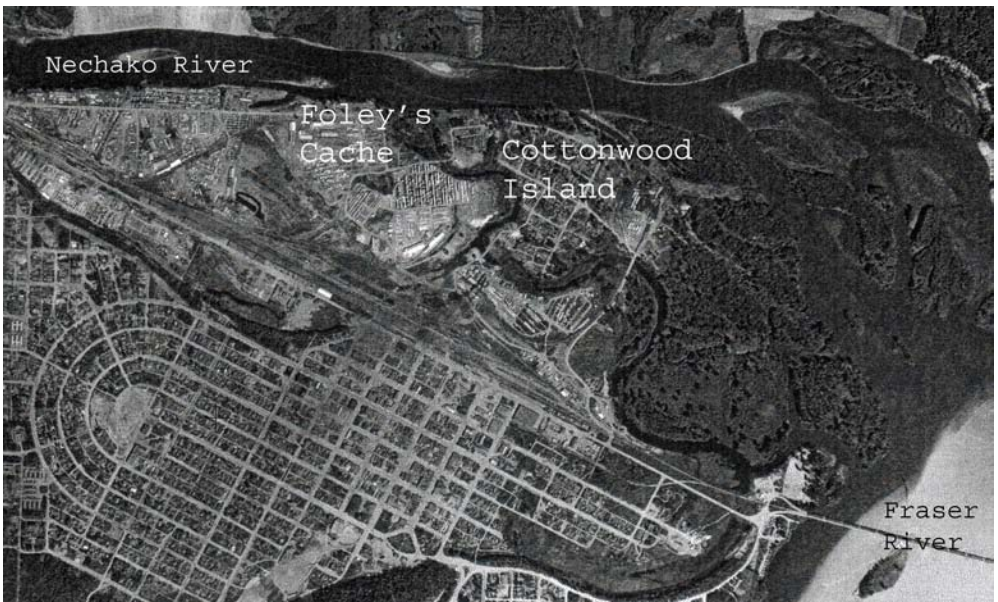
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Since its introduction in 1998 the Tri-Council Policy Statement on “Ethical Conduct for Research involving Humans” (hereafter referred to as the “Tri-Council policy” or just the “policy”) has had more and more impact on social science research in Canada. All across the country “Research Ethics Boards” have been set up, and the eight central principles of the Tri-Council Guidelines now set the terms of reference for almost all university associated research with people.

On the surface, there is little to quarrel with in the policy itself. There have been increasingly audible mutterings in the hallways of the academy about the way the guidelines have been interpreted and enforced by various Research Ethics Boards, but not particularly about the guidelines themselves. The eight central principles are:

- *Respect for Human Dignity*
- *Respect for Free and Informed Consent*
- *Respect for Vulnerable Persons*
- *Respect for Privacy and Confidentiality*
- *Respect for Justice and Inclusiveness*
- *Balancing Harms and Benefits*
- *Minimizing Harm*
- *Maximizing Benefit*

Respect, clearly a good thing, figures prominently. But, by way of example of why the uniform application of these principles is problematic, I would like to talk about a place called the “Island Cache,” an urban Aboriginal ghetto just on the outskirts of the City of Prince George in Northern BC. This is in and of itself an engaging story, but I want to tell you about the “Cache.” I want to make a few comments about contemporary community centred research and the way the Tri-Council policy is having some impacts that are, contrary to its central principles, not particularly respectful. I use the term “community centred,” as I am convinced by Jim McDonald’s (2003) argument that the term “community based” says nothing about the role of the community in the research process. Community centred research is just that, a research process that is both located at the community, and one that centralizes community concerns and participation. The central question this paper addresses is: Can community centred research be respectfully undertaken while embracing the notion of anonymity of research participants?

ANONYMITY AND THE ISLAND CACHE

The Island Cache was a small, unincorporated community at the meeting of the Nechako and Fraser Rivers. The place name is actually an amalgam of two previously distinct places. Foley's Cache, an equipment depot associated with the construction of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway (see Leonard 1996), is the source of the "Cache" part of the name. An island at the mouth of the Nechako, which was later named Cottonwood Island, contributed the 'Island' portion. In 1998, a number of people got together to launch "The Island Cache Recovery Project." The Project was community-centered and participatory. It was guided by an advisory committee consisting of former

Figure 1: Foley's Cache 1913. Photo courtesy of The Exploration Place.

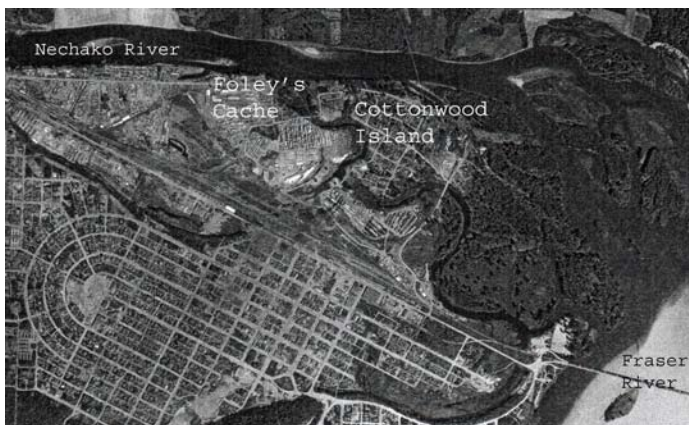


Figure 2: The Nechako Fraser Junction 1955. Photo courtesy of the City of Prince George.

Figure 3: Winter Flood on the Nechako — 1970.
Photo by Dave Milne courtesy of the Prince George Citizen.



Figure 4: Summer Flood on the Nechako — 1948.
Photo Courtesy of Dick and Joyce Lawrence.



residents of the Island Cache, members of the Prince George Métis Elders Society, and representatives from the University of Northern BC and the University of Alberta. The purpose of the project was to recover the history of a community that no longer exists. By means of interviews and the compilation of an extensive archive, the project attempted to revisit the community, and understand its demise. The Island Cache existed as a viable residential community for almost five decades, and the replacement of the residential community with industry in the late 1970s was a land use decision people thought should be revisited.

What happened in the Cache was all about power — the power of governments over people and the power of rivers over land. The Nechako Fraser River Junction is subject to flooding in both the winter and spring-summer

periods. In the winter ice jams at the Fraser can back water and ice up the Nechako. In the summer, if both the Fraser and Nechako rise at the same time, the waters of the Nechako back up from the Junction instead of flowing into the Fraser. Minor spring-summer flooding at the Nechako Fraser Junction occurs almost annually, and significant floods have occurred about every 10 to 20 years.

From the 1910s on, the Island that eventually became the Island Cache was gradually joined to the mainland (through dyking and backfilling), but the area was not part of the City of Prince George until 1970. The area was also cut off from the city by the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway (later Canadian National Railway – CNR) tracks. The CNR land (Foley's Cache) was inside



Figure 5: CNR Tracks — 1959. Photo courtesy of The Exploration Place.

city limits, but very much under the control of the railway. In fact only CNR employees were allowed to live there, and the Island was first settled by Euro-Canadians when the Bonds (a prominent Prince George family) were forced off illegally settled land inside the CNR land. They moved their home across a flood channel, and outside city boundaries, to the Island in the 1920s (Sugden 1985: 1). Lots on the Island were eventually sold, some for booming grounds and some for residential purposes, and over the next few decades a mixed industrial and residential land use pattern emerged.

By the 1960s, the community of the Island Cache was surrounded by planer mills and other heavy industry. As industry in the area grew, the Island Cache became less and less amenable to residents, and land values began to drop. As an unincorporated area there were few services and poor fire protection. Although the area was no worse in terms of housing than other areas on

Figure 6: Air Pollution in the Cache — 1972. Photo by Rick Hull courtesy of the *Prince George Citizen*.



the outskirts of the city at the time (see Parker 1965), the housing stock was varied, and a great deal was sub-standard. The community was a relatively poor place, filled with working class families, families on welfare, and families of the working poor. In the 1960s and 1970s, these people were mostly also either Aboriginal or the most recently arrived immigrants from Europe. Only a small proportion of the community was made up of established European Canadian immigrants — those who were “white” were mostly poor.

For many in the City of Prince George the Island Cache was a “festering sore” and “a potential breeding ground for crime, disease, and social disorders” (Anonymous 1969). Nonetheless, the city annexed the area in 1970. This annexation was part of a deal between the Province of BC and the city. The province allowed the annexation of lands on the north bank of the Nechako that contained a large concentration of heavy industry, but insisted that the city also take responsibility for the Island Cache at the same time. The annexation of the Cache was almost inevitable as the community lay directly between the land the city wanted and the city itself. It would be fair to say that the general impression of the city authorities, and most of the middle and upper classes of Prince George, was that the Cache was an area of poor housing, poorer people, and profound social problems. It was, in other words, a slum — and one in need of removal.

For many residents of the Cache this was not the case, however. They thought, and fought, to have the area improved. From shortly before annexation until 1972 the Island Cache residents, assisted by political activists from the Company of Young Canadians and the BC Association of Non-Status Indians, worked to ensure the survival of their community within the City of Prince George. Very soon however, it became clear that the city wanted none

Figure 7: Youth Drop-in Centre — 1972. Photo by Dave Milne courtesy of the *Prince George Citizen*.



of the Island Cache, and hoped to convert the entire area into heavy industry. From 1970 to 1972 there was an increasingly bitter political battle between the city and Island Cache residents, with the city manipulating planning commissions to eventually produce planning documents that flat out said the community should be razed, and the community people building up community infrastructure as best they could. The Island Residents Association



worked with other organizations on a number of projects, including a Youth Drop-in Centre, and the construction of new playground facilities for the Cache's children. The residents and their supporters also organized a number of high profile protests in an attempt to shame city authorities into action.

This is not the place to go into all the ins and outs of what happened. A great more detail is forthcoming in a monograph entitled *A Brief History of the Short*

Figure 8: Kids Playing Volley Ball at Island Cache School — July 1970. Photo by Rick Hull courtesy of the *Prince George Citizen*.



Figure 9: Mrs. Lucille Mossman and Mrs. Ivy Carpenter at Dump Protest — 1970. Photo courtesy of the *Prince George Citizen*.

Residents and supporters raised 1900 feet of the dyke protecting the community by 2 feet. The very next month, on December 1, an ice jam raised water levels on the Nechako to within a foot of the new dyke height (see Figure 3). On December 2, the City finally sent its crews out to begin raising River Road — too little (and without the residents' work on the dyke) too late. The rest of the interaction between city and residents had pretty much the same tenor, until the River did what the city could not, and delivered the

Life of the Island Cache (Evans et al. *under review*). A description of one episode will have to serve as an example. After annexation in May of 1970, residents appealed to the city to improve flood protection measures for the community. After a great deal of foot dragging, the city agreed to only half measures, electing to raise the perimeter road (River Road) at a cost of \$1500, rather than the dyke itself at \$4200. In response residents organized "Operation Sandbag" or "Up the Dyke Day."



Figure 10: Poor People's Protest in City Council Chambers — 1971. Photo by Rick Hull courtesy of the *Prince George Citizen*.



Figure 11: “Crowd In” Protest at City Hall — Winter 1972. Photo by Rick Hull courtesy of the *Prince George Citizen*.

coup de grâce to the Island Cache.

In the summer of 1972, heavy rains and warm weather raised both the Nechako and the Fraser to dangerous levels, and water began to seep *under the dyke*. This quote, from Rose Bortolon, an Island Cache resident at the time, is a poignant one both for what it says about geology, and politics.

Figure 12: Operation Sandbag 1970 L-R John Carifelle, Jules Morin, Doug Carifelle, Elizabeth Carifelle. Photo by Rick Hull courtesy of the *Prince George Citizen*.



Figure 13: Early June Flood — 1972. Road Closed early June 1972. Photo by Dave Milne courtesy of the *Prince George Citizen*.



. . . before the flood . . . they were dyking. People were just working hard dyking the river. They were . . . sand-bagging and sandbagging . . . (*Int: We found out that the water . . . doesn't just come up over the edge. It comes up underneath the ground . . . it comes up through the bottom*). That's why the sandbag didn't help. Yeah, well, we didn't know that. [laugh] Everybody just worked side by side. (Rose Bortolon née Cunningham, Cache Resident 1969-1972)



Figure 14: Mid-June Flood — 1972. Photo courtesy of Kent Sedgwick.



Figure 15: Sanitary Condemnation Notice — 1972. House Condemned by Medical Health Officer. L-R: Cecille Murray, Mike Robson (fieldworker for British Columbia Association of Non-Status Indians), NDP MLA Bill Hartley, and Lawrence Gladue (Vice-President, British Columbia Association of Non-Status Indians). Photo by Rick Hull courtesy of the *Prince George Citizen*.

By mid-June, most of the Island Cache was under water. This was the excuse the city needed. Like the water from the river, the power of the city began to seep under the political dykes the community had built. Using health and building inspectors to condemn buildings, over the next six months the city was able to bulldoze and burn the vast majority of the homes in the community.

Figure 16: Bulldozer Demolishes Home — 1972. Photo courtesy of the *Prince George Citizen*.





Figure 17: The Nechako Fraser Junction 1978. Photo courtesy of the City of Prince George.

Since 1972 the Island Cache has become more and more industrial as low-lying areas have been backfilled and mills have expanded. The eastern part of Cottonwood Island is now a park, and the western part a heavy industrial area (with a very few homes remaining). It is not only difficult to see where the community of the Island Cache once stood — it is a challenge to even see there was once an Island.

The Island Cache was removed, partly by water, and partly by political power. The memory of the community has been eroded further. It has been erased from the history created by street signs, and substituted with the much earlier, and more westerly, image of Foley and his railway. The Island Cache is not just gone, it has been replaced. There was never a street in the Island Cache called Foley Crescent. Most people



Figure 18: Corner of River Road and Foley's Crescent. Photo by Mike Evans.

in Prince George today don't even realize that the Island Cache and Foley's Cache are different places.

During the project from which the book *A Brief History of the Short Life of the Island Cache* was produced, we asked people what they thought about what happened to the community in the early 1970s. A lot of people said a lot of things, but here are two examples.

I don't know whether I should be so bold as to say it, but I think that the agenda was to . . . obliterate . . . the Native heritage that was down there . . . We didn't know what racism was in those days . . . but we certainly learned it when we came to town. . . . We noticed it, not toward us specifically . . . we spoke English, we don't speak English with an accent, we're white. But we saw the racism, and we experienced the hurt . . . the Native Indians were feeling, because they weren't Native Indians to us — they were people. They were our friends. (Cache Resident 1955-1965)

I think when they started dumping garbage and stuff down there while there was still people living there [it] was kind of a slap in the face to the people down there. The people down there never really felt like they belonged to the City of Prince George . . . it was a separate community. It could've been a nice place. (Cache Resident 1952-1964)

As befits a community centred research project, *A Brief History* is full of such quotes — about 60% of the text comes directly from the people we interviewed. Some of the people, like Rose Bortolon (who was a key organizer of the project), are recognized for what they have to say. Others, like the two people responsible for the last quotations, have yet to be identified specifically because of the issues of confidentiality and anonymity.

RESPECT FOR PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

For the rest of this article I will concentrate on some of the tensions between acknowledgement and anonymity in contemporary social science research — and especially community centered research. The two quotations

above, the ones without attribution, lack a speaker because we (the project organizers) are still waiting for the explicit permission to use the people's names in the book (in fact, we have permission, but it is not explicit enough). I can assure you that these people want their names in the book, but we must wait, and if we can't track the individuals down and get final signatures, the book will go to press without their names.

Tri-Council policy enshrines "Respect for Privacy and Confidentiality" as one of its eight central principles. In the introduction of the ethics document the following can be found:

Respect for human dignity also implies the principles of respect for privacy and confidentiality. In many cultures, privacy and confidentiality are considered fundamental to human dignity. Thus, standards of privacy and confidentiality protect the access, control and dissemination of personal information. In doing so, such standards help to protect mental or psychological integrity. They are thus consonant with values underlying privacy, confidentiality and anonymity respected. (<http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/english/policystatement/policystatement.cfm>)

On the surface, there is very little to disagree with here. However, I want to question the statement that confidentiality (anonymity) protects mental or psychological integrity. Confidentiality and anonymity can be quite valuable in protecting people in research involving psychological experiments or quantitative sociological surveys where there is absolutely no cost to the research, or it is essential to the validity of the research paradigm. In qualitative branches of sociology, history, anthropology, or Indigenous studies, and especially in the context of much community centred research, anonymity can obscure community authority and voice, and the intent of the principle above is undone. In fact, misplaced confidentiality can "disappear" people and communities as surely as "Foley Crescent" erases the Island Cache from the historical landscape.

Section 3 of the Tri-Council policy deals specifically with issues of confidentiality and anonymity. Nowhere in this section, or for that matter anywhere else in the document, does a research participant's right to be recognized as the source of information get any ink. The document does deal very carefully with how to maintain confidentiality in the context of primary research and secondary data use. But except where information is collected individually and then aggregated (i.e., in quantitative research such as a demographic survey), confidentiality in a community is a much bigger problem than using pseudonyms or anonymity can accommodate. When talking

about oral history and/or contemporary social issues, anonymity might protect people from outsiders, but less dependably from people within the community. This is especially a problem when there is an explicit commitment on the part of the researchers to make research results available to as wide a cross-section of the community as possible (as there is with *A Brief History* and the Canadian Circumpolar Institute's Solstice Series to which the book has been submitted). The same might be said of whole communities — i.e., the practice of assigning pseudonyms to communities only protects the community from people who don't care to do the little bit of digging required to figure out the real community identity. As researchers struggle to make research community centered — increasing the participation of community in setting research questions, undertaking the research itself, and producing community accessible research products — confidentiality becomes more and more difficult to maintain, and more and more costly (in terms of other values like representation, authority, and voice) to the communities.

Are confidentiality and privacy moot? No. Contemporary community centered research agendas must recognize that anonymity is not a panacea for maintaining ethics, and must not (to make a hybrid of two metaphors of common anatomical reference) become a band-aid that protects institutional butts while leaving community ones exposed. This may be an especially poignant issue when it comes to Indigenous communities who have suffered expropriation of various types. But if one goes to Section 6 of the Tri-Council policy, a section that deals directly with Aboriginal persons, you will find what is basically a call for participatory research without any reconsideration of the issues of anonymity.

What then? How does this affect "science," as it surely does? I mean to imply that the content of research needs to be tested against the protection of (more positively, the benefit to) "mental or psychological integrity" and I would add social integrity, of communities. For many people this might be heretical, tantamount to censorship — certainly and explicitly what I am saying means that some things might simply not be researchable in some contexts (of course the Tri-Council policy has the same implications). I do not mean to suggest that difficult issues should be avoided in, or by, any community (though I do mean to state plainly that some issues should be addressed in terms of intervention and community activism rather than as research problems). Against the loss of research results is the issue of benefits, the benefits to communities that come of effective participatory research, truly community centred research projects, and research results that community members can interpret, own, and in which they see themselves reflected

and named. Anonymity is not, at least not always, the best route to ethical research. The challenge is to do research and to produce research results that are ethical in content and structure rather than structure alone.

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Final authorship and responsibility for the research results reported in the book *A Brief History* lies with Mike Evans and Lisa Krebs, with John Bogle, Bob Parris, and Heidi Standeven. Responsibility for this article lies with Mike Evans alone.

