Suspending Damage:
A Letter to Communities

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In this open letter, Eve Tuck calls on communities, researchers, and educators to reconsider the long-term impact of "damage-centered" research—research that intends to document peoples' pain and brokenness to hold those in power accountable for their oppression. This kind of research operates with a flawed theory of change: it is often used to leverage reparations or resources for marginalized communities yet simultaneously reinforces and reinscribes a one-dimensional notion of these people as depleted, ruined, and hopeless. Tuck urges communities to institute a moratorium on damage-centered research to reformulate the ways research is framed and conducted and to reimagine how findings might be used by, for, and with communities.

Dear Readers,

Greetings! I write to you from a little desk in my light-filled house in New York State, my new home after living in Brooklyn for the past eleven years. Today, New York does not seem so far from St. Paul Island, one of the Pribilof Islands of the Aleutian chain in Alaska, where my family is from and where my relations continue to live. Something about writing this letter closes the gap between these disparate places I call home.

I write to you about home, about our communities. I write to identify a persistent trend in research on Native communities, city communities, and other disenfranchised communities—what I call damage-centered research. I invite you to join me in re-visioning research in our communities not only to recognize the need to document the effects of oppression on our communities but also to consider the long-term repercussions of *thinking of ourselves as broken.*

This is an open letter addressed to educational researchers and practitioners concerned with fostering and maintaining ethical relationships with disenfranchised and dispossessed communities and all of those troubled by the possible hidden costs of a research strategy that frames entire communities as depleted.

Thank you to those who have encouraged me to write this letter. I am humbled by the prospect of writing to such a rich, diverse audience. Each word struggles to be adequate, to convey my respect and urgency.

This is a good time to write. It is meaningful that I write to you at the close of the International Polar Year (IPY). Actually spanning two years (March 2007–March 2009), the IPY program brought over 200 research projects from more than 60 different nations to the Arctic and Antarctic. Reports from Indigenous polar peoples and Western-style scientists on the severity of climate change and the dramatic loss of polar ice mark this as a critical time for research in polar regions.

This fourth IPY (the first from 1882 to 1883 and the most recent from 1957 to 1958) was actually the first in which Indigenous peoples in polar regions were considered part of the focus of inquiry—a mixed signal of progress. It was a step toward redressing the omission of Indigenous polar peoples as integral to polar places, and it was recognition that the relationships between polar peoples and polar places hold deep knowledge. Yet it also ushered scholars into Indigenous communities that may be wary of "scientists" because of their and their ancestors' prior experiences with researchers.

Though there is no designated International Urban Center Year, the organizers and educators working in youth and community organizations across the United States have told me that they, too, have seen a striking increase in the number of researchers knocking at their doors hoping to do research on them and their communities. The lives of city youth—already under the watchful eyes of police and school security officers, already tracked by video cameras in their schools, on the streets, and in subways—are pursued by (well-intentioned) researchers whose work functions as yet another layer of surveillance. What will be the outcomes and effects of this research in and on our communities? Are we certain that the benefits will outweigh the costs? What questions might we ask ourselves before we allow researcher entry?

As letter-writing timing goes, we are in significant times for other reasons, too. Around the world there are new efforts to secure the rights of historically oppressed peoples and to make amends for the wrongs of the past. In September 2007, after twenty years of negotiations, the United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted with 143 votes in favor and 4 votes of objection (from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States). This declaration addresses many issues germane to educational research, including issues of intellectual property, sovereignty, difference, and reparation—all critical in terms of educational policy, practice, and theory. The declaration also provides that "all doctrines, policies and practices based on or advocating superiority of peoples or individuals on the basis of national origin or racial, religious, ethnic or cultural differences are racist, scientifically false, legally invalid, morally condemnable and socially unjust"—a statement that holds powerful implications for education and educational research (UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007).

Several months later, in March 2008, the UN issued a report blasting the United States as a "two-tiered society" in terms of education, health, land and housing, and criminal justice (Rizvi, 2008). It condemned U.S. treatment of Indigenous, black, and Latino/a peoples and other racial groups who represent a numeric minority. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination that conducted the investigation was the same body that denounced the United States for treading on Indigenous peoples' land rights in March 2006. To account for the breaking of the 1969 Convention of the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (an international treaty that the United States *did* sign), "Bush administration officials held that the treaty obligations do not apply to laws or practices that are race-neutral on their face but discriminatory in effect" (Rizvi, 2008, para. 10).

In February 2008, many people across the globe watched as Kevin Rudd, prime minister of Australia, made a formal apology to the Indigenous peoples of that land for the actions and policies of his government and prior governments, stating:

> As Prime Minister of Australia, I am sorry . . . I know that, in offering this apology on behalf of the government and the parliament, there is nothing I can say today that can take away the pain you have suffered personally. Whatever words I speak today, I cannot undo that. (Rudd, 2008)

After Rudd's closing words, opposition leader Brendan Nelson delivered quite a different address. He, too, spoke of an apology, of shame, but he insisted that no generation can fully anticipate the long-term impact of its actions, undermining his own words of reconciliation. In a powerful gesture, the Indigenous peoples in the room and those watching the proceedings outside on giant screens stood and turned their backs to him. Non-Indigenous peoples turned with them, and together they began a slow, rhythmic clapping to drown out the rest of Nelson's speech. It was an effective display of the end of patience extended to those who think of colonization as merely the unfortunate sins of our fathers. In spring 2009, Rudd's administration officially backed the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, a step that echoes sentiments proffered in his 2008 address but remains only a gesture until the ratification is enacted by policies, court decisions, and practices.

This year is also one in which a new presidential administration has been installed in the United States. It may also be a capstone year, or a recommitment year, for policies such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and "data-driven decision making" that make sizable impressions on the lives and work of communities, educators, and educational researchers. It is a very good year to write a letter.

I write this letter to communities—primarily Native communities and/or urban communities—that have troubled relations with research and researchers. The trouble comes from the historical exploitation and mistreatment of people and material. It also comes from feelings of being overresearched yet,

ironically, made invisible. My colleague, Yasser Payne (personal communication, June 2007), has educated me in the ways that urban young men engaged in street lives, though visible in the literature, are invariably portrayed as either victims or perpetrators. These characterizations frame our communities as sites of disinvestment and dispossession; our communities become spaces in which underresourced health and economic infrastructures are endemic. They become spaces saturated in the fantasies of outsiders.

I write knowing that the designations I employ—urban and Native, disenfranchised, overresearched but underseen—do not quite capture enough of the experiences about which I am writing. Nonetheless, I use these categories to draw attention to the experiences of our communities. I write to you now because I believe that our communities can exercise a bounty of decision-making power in these issues. Further, because so many outsiders benefit from depicting communities as damaged, it will have to be these same communities that hold researchers accountable for the frameworks and attitudes they employ. It is too tempting to proceed as usual.

Designating Damage

> Isolate the seers. Make their dream seem like a nightmare. Fix their tongues so they can't get their story straight.
>
> Sekou Sundiata, *Space: A Monologue* (1997)

For many of us, the research on our communities has historically been damage centered, intent on portraying our neighborhoods and tribes as defeated and broken. For example, on the Aleutian Islands, those of my grandmother's generation were forced subjects in a range of studies, the purposes of which were concealed from them. Extending the long arm of the eugenics movement on behalf of colonization, white scientists entered Aleut communities with the full support of the U.S. government and with the arrogance and absence of reflexivity afforded by white supremacy:

> For most of the five centuries [of U.S. colonization], whites have had unrestricted power to describe Indians in any way they chose. Indians were simply not connected to the organs of propaganda so that they could respond to the manner in which whites described them. (Deloria, 1992, p. 66; see also Selden, 1999)
>
> Stories of teeth counting, rib counting, head measuring, blood drawn, bones dug up, medical treatment withheld, erroneous or fabricated ethnography, unsanctioned camera lenses, out-and-out lies, empty promises, cover ups, betrayals, these are the stories of our kitchen tables. (Tuck & Fine, 2007, p. 159)

These are the stories of First Alaska and Native America and of many communities across the United States and the globe. They are the finger-shaped bruises on our pulse points.

This is certainly damage-centered research *and* damaging research: "It is a history that still offends our deepest sense of our humanity" (Smith, 1999, p. 1). However, though related, it is not this kind of research that my letter seeks to address. Rather, here I am concerned with research that happens much more surreptitiously, research that invites oppressed peoples to speak but to "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. 152).

In damaged-centered research, one of the major activities is to document pain or loss in an individual, community, or tribe. Though connected to deficit models—frameworks that emphasize what a particular student, family, or community is lacking to explain underachievement or failure—damage-centered research is distinct in being more socially and historically situated. It looks to historical exploitation, domination, and colonization to explain contemporary brokenness, such as poverty, poor health, and low literacy. Common sense tells us this is a good thing, but the danger in damage-centered research is that it is a pathologizing approach in which the oppression singularly defines a community. Here's a more applied definition of damage-centered research: research that operates, even benevolently, from a theory of change that establishes harm or injury in order to achieve reparation.

Let's pause for a bit and think through this idea of a theory of change. Theories of change are implicit in all social science research, and maybe all research. The implicit theory of change will have implications for the way in which a project unfolds, what we see as the start or end of a project, who is our audience, who is our "us," how we think things are known, and how others can or need to be convinced. A theory of change helps to operationalize the ethical stance of the project, what are considered data, what constitutes evidence, how a finding is identified, and what is made public and kept private or sacred (Tuck, 2009).

I believe that for many well-meaning people, it is actually a de facto reliance on a potentially problematic theory of change that leads to damage-centered research. In a damage-centered framework, pain and loss are documented in order to obtain particular political or material gains. In many ways, the underlying theory of change is borrowed from litigation discourse. One of the most famous examples is the Kenneth and Mamie Clark doll test done in the 1940s, some of the results of which were submitted as evidence for the plaintiffs and later quoted in the ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education* (Cross, 1991). This test, initiated in part as Mamie Clark's master's thesis, helped to give credence to the concepts of internalized racism and black self-hatred (through use of the term "wishful thinking") by documenting the preference of black children, aged three to five, for white dolls. The Clarks used a range of items that included asking the children to identify the doll "you like to play with best," "that is a nice doll," "that looks bad," "that is a nice color," and "that looks like you" (Clark & Clark, 1947, p. 169).

Thurgood Marshall explained his use of the Clark and Clark doll test data in his argument for desegregation in these terms:

> If your car ran over my client, you'd have to pay up, and my function as an attorney would be to put experts on the stand to testify to how much damage was done . . . Ken Clark's doll test was a promising way of showing injury to these segregated youngsters. (Kluger, 1975, p. 397)

This theory of change, testifying to damage so that persecutors will be forced to be accountable, is extremely popular in social science research—so popular that it serves as a default theory of change, so ubiquitous that folks might think that it is entirely what social science is about. In educational research this is especially true: it is not difficult to recall scores of studies that portray schools and communities primarily as broken, emptied, or flattened. It's also prevalent in community organizing and youth organizing where a group illustrates, for example, the harms caused by environmental racism and systematic isolation and neglect.

Even if at first glance it appears to be a leap, I think we can also link research intent on documenting damage to educational policies such as No Child Left Behind. Certainly, schools and communities would benefit by bolstered accountability of public officials for school quality and student learning. However, NCLB, in its insistence on 100 percent proficiency for all students in all states by 2014, marked by adequate yearly progress (AYP), is designed to document failure or deficit rather than to provide opportunities to redress existing inequities (Noddings, 2007; Rebell & Wolff, 2008). As Rebell and Wolff (2008) note, "Although the drafters recognized initially the importance of both [the] objectives [of opportunity and proficiency] the law's actual provisions largely ignore the first goal—opportunity—and skew heavily toward carrying out the second goal—accountability" (p. 63). This policy and others, such as mayoral control in New York City that has systematically closed down all avenues for community participation in school decision making (YRNES, 2008), collude in the production of damage-driven data and, indeed, in the production of damage. (See also Gilborn [2005] for an analysis of white supremacy and education policy.)

Some scholars have built their careers around producing damage narratives of tribalized and detribalized peoples. Though it is no longer in fashion to frame research as "the problem with (insert tribe or urban community here)" as it was in past generations, the legacy of this approach is alive and well. (See also Harvey [1999] on "civilized oppression.") Native communities, poor communities, communities of color, and disenfranchised communities *tolerate* this kind of data gathering because there is an implicit and sometimes explicit assurance that stories of damage pay off in material, sovereign, and political wins. Many communities engage, allow, and participate in damage-centered research and in the construction of damage narratives as a strategy for correcting oppression. However, I worry that the theory of change itself may be

unreliable and ineffective. It is a powerful idea to think of all of us as litigators, putting the world on trial, but *does it actually work?* Do the material and political wins come through? And, most importantly, are the wins worth the long-term costs of *thinking of ourselves as damaged?*

To offer a counterstory, my friend and Indigenous scholar Sandy Grande (personal communication, April 2008) shared with me that some of the narratives *I* would categorize as damage centered, she would categorize as stories of colonization; the after-effects and the colonizing are inextricably linked. Earlier, Grande (2004) wrote:

> The "Indian Problem" is not a problem of children and families but rather, first and foremost, a problem that has been consciously and historically produced by and through the systems of colonization: a multidimensional force underwritten by Western Christianity, defined by White supremacy, and fueled by global capitalism. (p. 19)

Contemporary damage-centered narratives (of abuse, addiction, poverty, illness) in the United States can be directly tied to 400-plus years of occupation of Native lands, genocide, and colonization. Like Sandy, I can't help but hear these stories within the context of this history, but I suspect that for many people, Native and non-Native, this context has been made invisible and natural. As in African American communities that have been coarsely expected to have "gotten over slavery by now," Native American and First Alaskan communities are expected to have gotten over the past, which is reduced to the unfortunate birth pangs of a new nation, thus dismissing the very real and ongoing colonization of these communities to the corners of our imaginations (Tuck & Fine, 2007).

Although, as I have noted, damage-centered research involves social and historical contexts at the outset, the significance of these contexts is regularly submerged. Without the context of racism and colonization, all we're left with is the damage, and this makes our stories vulnerable to pathologizing analyses (Kelley, 1997). Our evidence of ongoing colonization by research—absent a context in which we acknowledge that colonization—is relegated to our own bodies, our own families, our own social networks, our own leadership. After the research team leaves, after the town meeting, after the news cameras have gone away, all we are left with is the damage.

I want to recognize that, particularly in Native communities, there was a need for research that exposed the uninhabitable, inhumane conditions in which people lived and continue to live. My ability to articulate this critique is due to the lessons and accomplishments that have been made on the backs of prior generations of communities and researchers. I have boundless respect for the elders who paved the way for respectful, mutually beneficial research in Indigenous communities. I appreciate that, in many ways, there was a time and place for damage-centered research. However, in talking with some of these elders, they agree that a time for a shift has come, that damage-centered

narratives are no longer sufficient. We are in a new historical moment—so much so that even Margaret Mead probably would not do research like Margaret Mead these days.[1]

Researching for Desire

> 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." . . . 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 afterschool specials and movies of the week that parade queer bruises and broken bones but shy away from the queer kiss.
>
> Craig Gingrich-Philbrook, "Auto-ethnography's Family Values" (2005)

One alternative to damage-centered research is to craft our research to capture *desire* instead of damage. I submit that a desire-based framework is an antidote to damage-centered research. An antidote stops and counteracts the effects of a poison, and the poison I am referring to here is not the supposed damage of Native communities, urban communities, or other disenfranchised communities but the frameworks that position these communities as damaged.

As I will explore, desire-based research frameworks are concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives. Considering the excerpt from Craig Gingrich-Philbrook (2005), desire-based frameworks defy the lure to serve as "advertisements for power" by documenting not only the painful elements of social realities but also the wisdom and hope. Such an axiology is intent on depathologizing the experiences of dispossessed and disenfranchised communities so that people are seen as more than broken and conquered. This is to say that even when communities are broken and conquered, they are so much more than that—so much more that this incomplete story is an act of aggression.

Several solid examples of such depathologizing work come to mind.[2] In these examples, typical scripts of blame are flipped, and latent assumptions about responsibility are provoked. For instance, in her study of the relationships between privatization of the public sphere and constructed public perceptions of women who are responsible for the death of their children, Sarah Carney (2006) argues:

> Race, class and gender work in combination within a current (U.S.) social and political moment that favors privatization and the withdrawal of public support to frame and construct various images of "natural" women, of "good" and "bad" mothers, and of female responsibility; and these now-familiar images work to support/bolster state policies regarding shrinking social assistance, and allow the state to place the burden for caring back on the backs of women, particularly women who are poor and of color. (p. 11)

Depathologizing studies such as Carney's resist all-too-easy, one-dimensional narratives of damage in order to expose ongoing structural inequity. Desire-based research frameworks, by contrast, can yield analyses that upend commonly held assumptions of responsibility, cohesiveness, ignorance, and paralysis within dispossessed and disenfranchised communities. Desire, yes, accounts for the loss and despair, but also the hope, the visions, the wisdom of lived lives and communities. Desire is involved with the *not yet* and, at times, the *not anymore*. In many desire-based texts (Anzaldúa, 1987; Cheng, 2001; Didion, 2005; Williams, 1992) there is a ghostly, remnant quality to desire, its existence not contained to the body but still derived of the body. Desire is about longing, about a present that is enriched by both the past and the future. It is integral to our humanness.[3]

To play out the in-the-real differences between damage and desire a bit, recently I took students in a graduate course on research methodology and writing to see the exhibit "Stereotypes vs. Humantypes: Images of Blacks in the 19th and 20th Centuries" at the Schomberg Center for Research on Black Culture at the New York Public Library in Harlem. The exhibit was divided between two rooms. The first side, the stereotypes side, featured historical everyday examples of advertising, entertainment, science, and educational images of black Americans—images that I am reluctant to describe here because I am sickened by my potential to perpetuate this hateful part of U.S. history. (Here again we arrive at a paradox of damage: to refute it, we need to say it aloud.) In one home-decorative wall hanging, a line of black toddlers is depicted with the words, "Alligator Bait." In a 1927 film poster for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, "The Greatest Human Drama Ever Filmed," a "Colorama Features release with a cast of thousands," invites us to "Hate Simon 'Legree'; Pity Uncle 'Tom'; Love little 'Eva'; Laugh at 'Topsy'" and gives us insight into the overdetermined ways in which white America might respond to black film characters and the everyday people who were "represented" by these characters.

In the other room of the exhibit, the "humantypes" side, we learned that many African Americans and U.S.-born Africans living in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries engaged in photography, mostly by capturing daguerreotype images, in part in order to refute prominent stereotypes. This section featured compelling, dimensional, nuanced images of African American people, such as the 1919 image of the Harlem Hell Fighters, beauty pageant contestants at Pacific Beach in 1925 by F. A. Weaver, James Latimer Allen's (1930) "Brown Madonna," and the captivating 1932 image of a woman titled "The Boss" by Prentice H. Polk. In "The Boss," a black woman in worn, textured work clothes poses, hands on the back of her hips, with driving certainty. Her expression reveals impatience, self-knowingness, careful watching, defiance—all of these, none of these.

The self-crafted images of black men, women, and children in the photographs and daguerreotypes are profoundly different than images in "Darkie" toothpaste (still available in some parts of the world) and "Black Up" burnt

cork–based makeup. These humantypes are layered in composition and meaning. They are determined to show complexity and often reveal contradiction. Though posed, they feature real bodies and faces—real skin in place of the cartoonish illustrations of the stereotypes. The photographs and daguerreotypes are images of desire, while the stereotypes are flat damage.

Poststructuralist theorists Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) teach us that desire is assembled, crafted over a lifetime through our experiences. For them, this assemblage is the picking up of distinct bits and pieces that, without losing their specificity, become integrated into a dynamic whole. This is what accounts for the multiplicity, complexity, and contradiction of desire, how desire reaches for contrasting realities, even simultaneously. Countering theorists that posit desire as a hole, a gap, or that which is missing (such as, and somewhat famously, Foucault) Deleuze and Guattari insist that desire is not lacking but "involution" (p. 164).[4] Exponentially generative, engaged, engorged, desire is not mere wanting but our informed seeking. Desire is both the part of us that *hankers* for the desired and at the same time the part that *learns to* desire. It is closely tied to, or may even be, our wisdom. In the Schomberg Center exhibit, stereotype images depicted African American people as subhuman, as objects, as jokes, as static. Conversely, as images of desire, humantype photographs and daguerreotypes portrayed African American people as having pasts and presents and futures, as dignified in work clothes, as simultaneously serious and exuberant.

To anchor this discussion, I turn back briefly to the Clark and Clark doll tests. In the damage framework that resulted, the emphasis was on the finding that black children aged three to five years preferred white dolls in a variety of ways. As Thurgood Marshall attested, this streamlined version of the study results was crucial in arguing that African American youth, like victims of a car accident, were damaged by racial segregation of schools (Cross, 1991). However, a desire framework—one that seeks to construct a fuller representation of children's views about the dolls, one that is open to complexity and contradictions—would have provoked further analysis of otherwise overlooked findings. For example, an earlier version of the Clark and Clark study found that white children aged three to five preferred black dolls. Further, that same study found that although black children aged three to five preferred white dolls, the trend reversed itself among black youth at age seven, who preferred black dolls (Cross, 1991). A desire-based framework that recognizes desire as multiplicitous and as assembled from prior experiences, and that utilizes depathologizing analyses, would have recast the interpretation of the same data Marshall cited. Further, regarding study design, in a desire framework, whether or not preference among three- to five-year-old children can really be used to project feelings of self-worth and self-hatred in adults would be examined. Although the *Brown v. Board* case has had a tremendous and powerful impact on the equality of public schooling and, more, the promise of equality in public schooling in the United States, I think it is worthwhile to

consider the impacts and limitations of the underlying theory of change at work in the suit. This reflection may help shed light on why and how, fifty-five years after *Brown v. Board*, the transformation of persistent racial hierarchies is incomplete.

In a real-life update to the Clark and Clark doll tests, the humantypes section of the "Stereotypes vs. Humantypes" exhibit also featured a short film called *A Girl Like Me* that Kiri Davis, then seventeen years old, made as part of her graduation portfolio at the Urban Academy public high school in New York City. Davis's film replicates the findings of the Clark and Clark doll tests, showing young black children consistently preferring white baby dolls over black baby dolls. However, Davis splices this footage together with footage of young women of color talking about their hair, their bodies, their mothers, and their identities. It is this splicing that captures the critical desire of young black women (including Davis)—the complexity and wholeness of their selves—rather than their "damage" (Davis, 2005).

A Cautionary Note

I am not arguing to install desire as an antonym to damage, as if they are opposites. It is important not to make the mistake of merely swapping one framework for another, nor is this merely an issue of political correctness or linguistic correction. Rather, it is an argument for desire as an epistemological shift.

It is certainly not a call for another "d" word: denial. It is not a call to paint everything as peachy, as fine, as over. In Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking* (2005), a memoir on the mournful aspects of desire, she writes, "The singer of the song about looking for the silver lining believes that clouds have come her way. The singer of the song about walking on through the storm assumes that the storm could otherwise take her down" (p. 171). Desire is the song about walking through the storm, a song that recognizes rather than denies that pain doubtlessly lies ahead.

As a theoretical concept, desire interrupts the binary of reproduction versus resistance. In social science, it is often believed that people are bound to reproduce or replicate social inequity or, on the flip side, that they can resist unequal social conditions. Critics on both sides accuse the other of oversimplifying, of underestimating the immense and totalizing power of systematic oppression on the one hand and the radical power of the human spirit and human agency on the other. It seems that the positions are irreconcilable.

Edward Soja (1996), deploying Henri Lefebvre's 1991 concept of the thirdspace, has described a process of thirding as a way to break the closed circuit of an irreconcilable binary: "Critical thirding as othering is the first and most important step in transforming the categorical and closed logic of either/or to the dialectically open one of both/and also . . ." (p. 60). Further, he characterizes the thirdspace as introducing "a critical 'other than' choice that speaks and critiques through its otherness" (p. 61). Desire is a thirding of the dichotomized categories of reproduction and resistance. It is neither/both/

and reproduction and resistance. This is important because it more closely matches the experiences of people who, at different points in a single day, reproduce, resist, are complicit in, rage against, celebrate, throw up hands/ fists/towels, and withdraw and participate in uneven social structures—that is, everybody. Desire fleshes out that which has been hidden or what happens behind our backs. Desire, because it is an assemblage of experiences, ideas, and ideologies, both subversive and dominant, necessarily complicates our understanding of human agency, complicity, and resistance.

On Complex Personhood

In part, a framework of desire can do all of this because it accounts for that which Avery Gordon (1997) calls complex personhood, which means that people

> get stuck in the symptoms of their troubles, and also transform themselves . . . that the stories people tell about themselves, about their troubles, about their social worlds, and about their society's problems are entangled and weave between what is immediately available as a story and what their imaginations are reaching toward. (p. 4)

Gordon (1997) describes complex personhood as "conferring the respect on others that comes from presuming that life and people's lives are simultaneously straightforward and full of enormously subtle meaning" (p. 5). In my application of this concept as part of a framework of desire, complex personhood draws on Indigenous understandings of collectivity and the interdependence of the collective and the person rather than on the Western focus on the individual.

I have learned a great deal about complex personhood from my colleague, Monique Guishard, who tells a story about working with her youth coresearchers on issues of critical consciousness during the day, tracing the legacy of their mothers' and grandmothers' work for social justice (Guishard, 2009). Later, Monique accompanied the same youth coresearchers to stand overnight in a long line outside of a shoe store, waiting for the anticipated release of a new sneaker. Monique was taken aback by the irony of the situation: on the same day these youth were openly critical of corporate capitalism and globalization, they waited with hundreds of other youth and adults to purchase an item that represents some of the worst elements of global capitalism and exploitation. But she was even more taken aback by her youth companions' awareness and ease in/side that irony. In a damage framework, one might surmise that, even when faced with options, youth are pliant to the consumerist status quo. However, in a desire-based framework that draws on the idea of complex personhood, we see that "all people remember and forget, are beset by contradiction, and recognize and misrecognize themselves and others" (Gordon, 1997, p. 4). We can desire to be critically conscious *and* desire the new Jordans, even if those desires are conflicting.

Within collectivity, recognizing complex personhood involves making room for the contradictions, for the mis/re/cognitions, usually in an effort to sustain a sense of collective balance. For tribal peoples, this can mean resisting characterizing one another in ways that tacitly reduce us to being either trapped in the irrelevant past or fouled up by modernity and by acknowledging that as twenty-first-century peoples, it is our collective duty to ensure that any and every member who chooses can engage in traditional sustenance practices, use science and Indigenous ecologies to understand the world around us, and attend relevant, respectful, and responsive schools. In sum, it is our work to afford the multiplicity of life's choices for one another (Grande, 2004).

In another example from my own work with a New York City–based youth participatory action research group called the Collective of Researchers on Educational Disappointment and Desire (CREDD), we refused to accept damage- or deficit-centered views on the General Educational Development (GED) credential. We called our project the Gate-ways and Get-aways Project (Table 1) because we explored the GED as a gateway to higher education and employment and also as a getaway route from inadequate high schools.

Existing research on the GED positioned it as a depleted credential, ineffective in getting its recipients through college or fully employed. Yet, at the same time, studies reported ever-increasing numbers of youth across the United States and especially in New York City flocking to the GED rather than a high school diploma. CREDD's research took a desire and complex personhood approach by insisting that there must be other values that youth place in the GED—that youth aren't being duped into getting a meaningless credential but, rather, that the meaning they place in it isn't understood by existing research (Tuck et al., 2008).

My youth coresearchers and I found an important link: with an increased reliance on the New York Regents tests as exit exams, the number of students opting for the GED also increased. We found that youth—especially those seen as disruptive, as not going to pass the tests, or as not good enough speakers of English—are encouraged to leave school and get a GED by administrators, teachers, and guidance counselors. Finally, we found that youth value the GED

TABLE 1   *A Comparative Look at Frameworks—the Gate-ways and Get-aways Project*

Damage-Centered Interpretations	*Desire-Based Interpretations*
Value of GED is depleted.	The value of GED is related to its role as an emergency exit from negative high school experiences.
Youth are making bad choices or are being duped into getting a GED.	Youth make the best choices they can based on the information available to them.
Youth are lazy, unable to make wise decisions, or nihilistic.	Youth care deeply about their futures as well as their current situations.

not only as a gateway to higher education and employment but also, importantly, as a get-away from disappointing and dehumanizing high schools (see Tuck, 2008; Tuck et al., 2008).

CREDD's research was grounded in the assumptions that New York City students are worthy of respect and consideration as complex, whole people. It draws on a theory of change that posits a need to understand the intricacies of people's lives in order to point toward ways of becoming more of who we are (Anzaldúa, 1987). It is our work as educational researchers and practitioners, and especially as community members, to envision alternative theories of change, especially those that rely on desire and complexity rather than damage.

Suspending Damage: A Call for a Moratorium on Damage-Centered Research

> Regeneration means that we will reference ourselves differently, both from the ways we did traditionally and under colonial domination.
>
>   Taiaiake Alfred, *Wasase: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (2005)

I close this letter with two earnest questions. Is it time for our communities to call a moratorium on damage-centered research? How might this moratorium be useful to us?

I humbly submit that the time has come for our communities to refuse to be complicit in our further categorization as *only* damaged, as *only* broken. In many communities, such a moratorium is already under way, and both "insider" and "outsider" researchers who employ a damage framework are being turned away at the gate.

Let's face it. Some folks out there are always going to think of us as damaged, and not because they are so convinced of the devastating after-effects of colonization. But it is crucial to recognize that our communities hold the power to begin shifting the discourse away from damage and toward desire and complexity. We can insist that research in our communities, whether participatory or not, does not fetishize damage but, rather, celebrates our *survivance* (Brayboy, 2008; Grande, 2004; Vizenor & Lee, 1999). More importantly, damage can no longer be the *only* way, or even the main way, that we talk about ourselves.

Survivance is a key component to a framework of desire. Gerald Vizenor's (1994) concept of survivance is distinct from survival: it is "moving beyond our basic survival in the face of overwhelming cultural genocide to create spaces of synthesis and renewal" (p. 53). Elsewhere Vizenor (1998) writes,

> Survivance, in my use of the word, means a native sense of presence, the motion of sovereignty and the will to resist dominance. Survivance is not just survival but also resistance, not heroic or tragic, but the tease of tradition, and my sense of survivance outwits dominance and victimry. (p. 93)

Related to this point, for Indigenous peoples—and for peoples in places such as the Ninth Ward, the South Bronx, South Dallas, and Oakland—a framework that accounts for and forwards our sovereignty is vital. We can practice our sovereignty within a framework of desire but cannot within a damage framework. By this I mean that a framework of desire recognizes our sovereignty as a core element of our being and meaning making; a damage framework excludes this recognition.

To forward our survivance, to deepen our sovereignty, I believe it is time for a moratorium on damage-centered research in our communities. This moratorium will put a freeze on damage-centered research efforts while stakeholders in our communities take some time to reflect on the positive and negative outcomes of past damage-centered research on our peoples; to create and implement guidelines for researchers working in our communities; and to (re)consider the roles of research in our communities. I believe that a moratorium on damage-centered research in our communities could give us the time to accomplish three goals:

Re-vision our theories of change. The first goal for a proposed moratorium is to re-vision and firm up our theory(ies) of change and to determine what role, if any, research has in making our dreams come true for our communities. It is important to ask, when considering a new community research project, "What can research really do to improve this situation?" The answers might reveal that research can do little in a particular situation or quite a lot in another. Or they may reveal that it is not the research that will make the difference but, rather, who participates in the research, who poses the questions, how data are gathered, and who conducts the analysis. This is a call to not take theories of change for granted, but to be sure that our actions make steps toward our purposes.

Establish tribal and community human research ethics guidelines. Another goal of the proposed moratorium is to learn from and build on the work happening in tribes and communities all over the globe to establish tribal or community human research ethics guidelines and to develop and strengthen the committees or other structures to maintain these guidelines. Communities might also consider guidelines that protect cultural, intellectual, and sacred knowledges from being stolen, appropriated, or handled in ways that are disrespectful. Further, communities might consider guidelines that are extended to land, flora, and fauna that hold meanings unobserved by the "whitestream" academy (Battiste, 2008; see also appendix A). The work to establish and enforce ethical guidelines and conditions in research on tribes and urban communities has been under way for more than a decade, but the guidelines do not usually address the framing of the research. Communities might consider establishing guidelines that insist on frameworks of desire and work with researchers to reframe damage-centered projects as desire-based inquiries.

Create mutually beneficial roles for academic researchers in community research.
A third goal of the proposed moratorium could be to reassess the role of
the academy in community research—to consider, in Orlando Fals-Borda and
Ansuir Rahman's (1991) words, "breaking the monopoly" the academy has
on research and community self-knowledge. In many ways, this is a call for
a remembrance of the true purpose of knowledge in/for our communities.
Through this (re)consideration, tribes and communities might decide that
there is no role, or a diminished role, for academic researchers in certain
kinds of inquiry projects and a larger (even a leadership) role for academic
researchers in other kinds of studies. Regardless of the size of the role, rela-
tionships among the academy and tribes and communities should be mutually
beneficial, with an emphasis on the real, positive outcomes for communities in
both the short and long term.

For some, a moratorium may signal an end or a sense of finality. To me, a
moratorium provides an opportunity for what Indigenous scholar Taiaiake
Alfred (2005) calls regeneration, "the direct application of acting against our
ingrained and oppressive fears" (p. 151). It is simultaneously an acknowledg-
ment of historic pain and taking action against that pain in order to reframe
that history. This duality is represented by the Raven—to some the Raven
is a fearsome signal of mortality, but to many Indigenous peoples Raven is
the embodiment of curiosity and the full picture of truth. As Alfred (2005)
elaborates:

> We will self-consciously recreate our cultural practices and reform our politi-
> cal identities by drawing on tradition in a thoughtful process of reconstruction
> and a committed reorganization of our lives in a personal and collective sense.
> This will result in a new conception of what it is to live as Onkwehonwe [original
> people]. (p. 34)

Alfred's work ties regeneration to integrity, to recapturing, recommitting to
a life, to lives, walked in integrity. I think of the thousands who turned their
backs on the remarks of the Australian opposition leader—theirs was a step
along a path of integrity. This moratorium—a turning of our own backs on
narratives that insist that we are ruined, that we are broken, that we are dam-
aged—is a step, too. Dear readers, I hold that in these ways we can carve out
the future legacy of our relationships to research.

> In hope and solidarity,
>
> Eve Tuck
> Summer 2009

Notes

1. This epiphany arose from a conversation that I had with another researcher who has worked with Native communities in the United States for several decades.
2. For examples, see Carney (2006), Fine (1991), Fine and McClelland (2006), Graham (1992), Haney (1997), Kelley (1997), Lamb (1996), Tuck et al. (2008).
3. My theorizing of desire draws from the works of Sondra Perl (1980), Ann Anlin Cheng (2001), Julia Kristeva (1980), Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987), Joan Didion (2005), bell hooks (1990), Patricia Williams (1992), and Toni Morrison (1987), among others.
4. This philosophical divergence is best captured in a series of letters that Deleuze wrote to Foucault in 1977, published in Davidson (1998).

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Appendix A: Resources on Tribal and Community Human Research Ethics Guidelines

Alaska Federation of Natives guidelines for research. Alaska Native Knowledge Network. http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/IKS/afnguide.html

Copyright issues. Sealaska Heritage Institute. http://www.sealaskaheritage.org/programs/copyright_issues.htm

Cultural and intellectual property rights. Alaska Native Knowledge Network. http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/rights.html

Guidelines for respecting cultural knowledge. Alaska Native Knowledge Network. http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/standards/knowledge.html

Hansen, S., & VanFleet, J. (2003). *Traditional knowledge and intellectual property.* Washington, DC: American Association for the Advancement of Science. http://shr.aaas.org/tek/handbook/handbook.pdf

Mataatua declaration on cultural and intellectual property rights of Indigenous people. Alaska Native Knowledge Network. http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/mataatua.html

Principles for the conduct of research in the Arctic. Alaska Native Knowledge Network. http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/IKS/conduct.html

Source note: Qagaasakung *to Dr. Ray Barnhardt of the Alaska Native Knowledge Network and University of Alaska Fairbanks for compiling this list.*