

KEEPERS OF THE WATER: EXPLORING ANISHINAABE AND MÉTIS WOMEN'S  
KNOWLEDGE OF WATER AND PARTICIPATION IN WATER GOVERNANCE IN  
KENORA, ONTARIO

by

Natasha J. Szach

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of  
The University of Manitoba  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Natural Resources Institute  
Clayton H. Riddell Faculty of Environment, Earth and Resources  
University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3T 2N2  
70 Dysart Road

August, 2013

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## ABSTRACT

The *Common Land, Common Ground* is a partnership between Kenora, ON, Grand Council Treaty #3, and three reserve communities in the area. This research focused on Aboriginal women's knowledge of water and participation in water governance under the auspices of the *Common Ground Research Forum*. Data was collected through qualitative research methods. This thesis is organized by objectives: 1) recording women's knowledge and teachings on water; 2) learning about the concerns women have regarding water in and around their communities; 3) establishing the role women have played and are playing in water governance in their communities; and 4) identifying culturally appropriate opportunities for shared learning about their connection to water and their role in its governance. Recommendations include: creating roles for Aboriginal women in new and existing governance structures, greater inclusion of Métis perspectives in *Common Ground* activities, and incorporation of Aboriginal water knowledge in school curricula and tourism resources.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I want to sincerely thank all of the women who shared their beautiful culture, their time, and their wisdom with me. Each one of you left a unique mark on this research and taught me something. Your openness amazed me. Some of you probably had hesitations about sharing so much of yourselves with me; thanks for your trust despite my numerous stumbles. Meegwetch, Nancy, for your guidance through it all.

Colette: Thanks for your warmth and enthusiasm for my project. I was fortunate to be able to make use of Women's Place during the course of my research.

Thank you to my advisor, John Sinclair, and committee members Iain Davidson-Hunt and Wanda Wuttunee for your thoughtful insights throughout this process. I also appreciated the freedom you gave me to take this in directions I saw fit. John: Thank you for the patience you showed while I embarked on a new path in the fall of 2012.

Being a member of the Common Ground Research Forum was a great experience. It was a privilege to be part of such an interesting and dedicated team of people. A special thank you to Teika Newton for lending me her ear from time to time and helping me get things off the ground when I first came to Kenora.

Without monetary support from SSHRC and the CURA project in Kenora, this would not have been possible. Thank you to the sponsors for seeing the value of such work.

Many thanks to Dalia Naguib and Tammy Keedwell at the Natural Resources Institute. Your assistance was appreciated more than you know.

I was lucky to also have recently been involved in an Anishinaabe water governance conference. That experience helped me to reflect on what I learned during my interviews, and I think it allowed me to come at this from a more informed perspective just before my defence. Thank you to everyone who shared their knowledge at the Roseau River gathering.

With immense debt, I want to acknowledge my parents. Mom: Your spirit moves me and is present in this work. Dad: I was grateful for your inquisitiveness and support. To you both: Your wisdom also lives within these pages. Thanks, as always, for your encouragement. And the financial assistance didn't hurt either.

Finally, a nod to Sophie, my furry friend who dutifully lay at my feet during most of this process. Your company lifted my spirits when the going got tough.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1.1 Background**

Water takes on different meanings around the world and is valued and understood in varying ways depending on context and culture, but its necessity is universal. Unfortunately, its degradation is nearing universal proportions as well, even in Canada, where popular belief is that our water resources are abundant and pure. Some attribute the continued degradation of our water resources to poor management resulting from a lack of political interest, prompting urgent calls for new and innovative water management paradigms (de Loë et al., 2009; Phare, 2009). Chief among those – and applicable to all forms of resource management – is the transition from “government” to “governance”, a critical ideological and practical shift currently characterizing environmental management. Fundamentally, this shift recognizes that perspectives based on a “...linear flow of information from science to policy...” are often less desirable than non-linear perspectives characterized by partnerships and shared learning amongst those involved (Cross and Smith, 2007). This transition acknowledges that government-controlled, top-down approaches – referred to as “managerial ecology” (Davidson-Hunt, 2003) – to management are losing relevance in the face of complex environmental issues such as water stewardship. New governance approaches advocate that management techniques are enhanced by the inclusion of a multiplicity of actors and experiences, including non-governmental organizations, the private sector and Indigenous peoples (de Loë et al., 2009).

An Indigenous perspective is increasingly viewed as essential to new governance approaches as a means of addressing historical exclusion from resources management, and

embracing a conceptualization of the environment that encourages moderation, sustainability and respect. Water has particular significance in many Indigenous cultures, making new water governance an ideal way to move beyond relegating First Nations to a “stakeholder” role and into a “partner” role.

Also gaining ground as an integral part of effective governance is the involvement of women. Women have generally been marginalized from resources management, and governance affords new opportunities to overcome the traditionally unequal power relationships between men and women in the context of environmental management and decision-making (Reed and Christie, 2009).

This research delved into Anishinaabe and Métis women’s rich contextual knowledge of water. Through the course of my research, data was also collected on the space between the theoretical application of governance (which can include Aboriginal women’s involvement) and the reality of the lack of opportunities for such participation in the Kenora region.

### **1.1.2 Context: *Common Land, Common Ground* in Kenora, Ontario**

This research is part of two larger projects, the *Common Land, Common Ground* (CLCG, or ‘*Common Ground*’) initiative and the *Common Ground Research Forum* (CGRF) in Kenora, both underpinned by themes of governance and shared learning.

Many people familiar with the area describe Kenora as being “unique” in its history, cross-cultural relations and landscape. Aesthetically, the rugged Canadian Shield is interrupted by the vast waters of the Lake of the Woods, which are dotted by a labyrinth of islands – a beauty that must be experienced to be understood. To its residents, the relationship to the land

and water has extended far beyond economic necessity into a deep sense of identity (Common Ground Annual General Meeting, 2011).

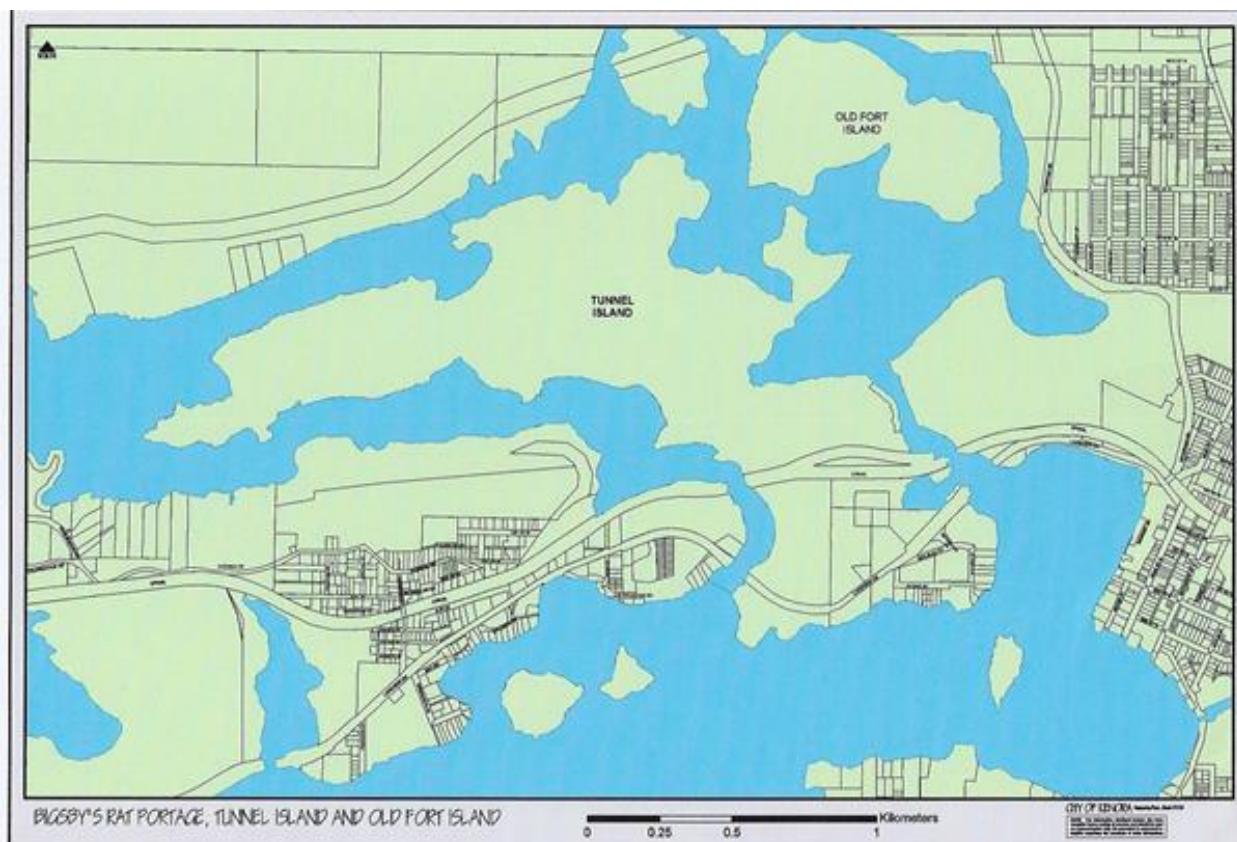
The region's topography and history are tightly linked. Kenora's story can be told through the land; it has witnessed generations of First Nations call it home, and settler populations pass through and put down roots. It has been a site for movement of people throughout history because its intricate system of rivers and lakes allowed people to move freely and travel easily. In particular, its situation at the intersection of the Lake of the Woods and the Winnipeg River on its journey north etched physical movement into the area's history. A common place for people to stop over along their way was the small island positioned where the lake and river meet, over the years called *Ka'ga'peke'che* (Ojibway for "a place to stay over"), Steep Rock Island, and most recently, Tunnel Island or *Wassay Gaa Bo*. The area was home to early commerce, namely at Old Fort Island, located to the northeast of Tunnel Island. Old Fort Island was once the site of the Rat Portage Hudson Bay Trading Post during the fur trade. Millennia of interactions between Indigenous groups predated even that activity (Common Ground Research Forum, 2010).

Kenora's story is also coloured by a long-standing struggle over resources and a conflict of cultural identity between the settler populations and First Nations (Davidson-Hunt, 2003). The roots of this disharmonious relationship are traced back to the signing of Treaty #3 in 1873, a document that granted the federal government access and control over the land (Morris 1880/1991). Subsequently, the *Indian Act, 1876*, served to further estrange First Nations from their land and way of life and to entrench attitudes of discrimination, contributing to the overall tension arising between First Nations and settler populations (Wallace, 2010).

This relationship characterized Kenora until relatively recently, and many would likely argue it still does, particularly in the context of natural resources. But in 2000, the City of Kenora and Grand Council Treaty #3 decided to begin a socio-political process of working collaboratively to ease historical tensions and proactively approach areas of mutual concern in unison (Dovetail Resources, 2006; Common Ground Research Forum, 2010). A few years later in 2004, the area between the Lake of the Woods and the Winnipeg River at the north end of Cameron Bay was identified as the historic “Bigsby’s Rat Portage”, the location of the first European settlement. In 2005, the Rat Portage was classified as an important historic site. This was a significant occurrence and a reminder of the holistic value of the entire area. The partners decided to link the event to their original regional initiative. Together they identified that the land could literally be called the “common ground”, and as their commitment to the initiative was reaffirmed over the coming years, the name *Common Land, Common Ground* was chosen to convey the spirit of shared stewardship of the Rat Portage common ground. A working group was struck to implement the concept.

Around the same time these social changes were occurring, Kenora was undergoing a substantial economic change. In the decades before the early 2000s, Kenora’s economy was based on forestry, and the town’s fortunes rode on pulp and paper production. However, facing many of the same challenges as other industries in Canada, owner Abitibi Consolidated announced it would be closing its mill in 2005, putting approximately 400 people out of work and impacting hundreds more. While a tremendous economic loss for the town, a precious opportunity presented itself: Tunnel Island was relinquished by the industry. The closing of the mill and the subsequent availability of Tunnel Island marked the next step for *Common Land, Common Ground* (Dovetail Resources, 2006; Wallace, 2010); the partnership acquired the land

under an agreement to manage it cooperatively for the mutual economic benefit of First Nations and non-First Nations (Wallace, 2010). In 2006, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Abitibi Consolidated, the Mayor of Kenora, and the Grand Chief of Treaty #3, signifying the intent of Abitibi to gift the area – Tunnel Island, Old Fort Island, the Rat Portage and another small, unnamed island – to “...a stewardship entity (*Common Land, Common Ground*) comprised of the Grand Council Treaty #3, the City of Kenora, and the First Nations of Obashkaandagaang, Ochiichagwe’babigo’ining, and Wauzhushk Onigum” (Common Ground Research Forum, 2010). Please see Figure 1 below for an approximate aerial representation of the area.



**Figure 1: Map of Bigsby’s Rat Portage, Tunnel Island and Old Fort Island**



The significance of water that I explored under the *Common Ground* initiative was that of Anishinaabe and Métis women's relationship to it. In Aboriginal culture, women are the keepers of knowledge of water – a rich, lived experience encompassing holistic appreciation and understanding that is often foreign to non-First Nations conceptions of water management and governance. This research was appropriate because interest in exploring women's knowledge of water was expressed by local Elder Nancy Morrison at the October 2010 *Common Ground Research Forum* partner's meeting, supported by community members. Through this research, I learned a great deal about that knowledge and approached this work with the goal of finding culturally appropriate ways for women's wisdom to be celebrated and shared with the *Common Land, Common Ground*.

### **1.1.3 Goals and objectives**

The primary goal of this research was to explore Aboriginal women's teachings and knowledge of water. A secondary goal was to convey that wisdom to the other partners in the *Rat Portage Common Ground Stewardship Organization* and the *Common Ground Research Forum*. My specific objectives were as follows:

- 1) Record women's knowledge, teachings and stories of water;
- 2) Learn about the concerns women have regarding water in and around their communities;
- 3) Establish the role women have played and are playing in water governance in their communities, including the waters that flow around *Common Ground*; and
- 4) Identify culturally appropriate opportunities for shared learning about Aboriginal women's connection to water and their role in its governance.

#### **1.1.4 Research methods**

I undertook this research qualitatively and from an advocacy and participatory worldview. This approach was fitting because I desired to create a piece of work that draws attention to the issue of Aboriginal women's knowledge of water and marginalization from water management, advocating for change in this regard. My strategy of inquiry was ethnography, which focuses on the individual meanings attached to the issues to be explored (Creswell, 2009). My related methods are discussed in detail in Chapter Three. Throughout my research, I was focused on listening to and understanding what my participants were expressing about water, and how they came to carry that knowledge.

#### **1.1.5 Literature review**

Before beginning any empirical research, a literature review was necessary to prepare myself academically and personally, and to be able to think through my initial proposal with a sense of appreciation for the subject matter. The literature included is primarily focused on water governance from Western and Aboriginal perspectives and the relationship between women and water, but also includes an examination of qualitative research and data collection procedures.

While the sources I have reflected upon have increased my knowledge and understanding of the issues I have covered, the process of accumulating this kind of knowledge and understanding was ongoing throughout the life of this research project.

#### **1.1.6 Participants**

Since this research focused predominately on women, I attempted to recruit interested participants by spending time at "Women's Place Kenora". I also placed posters at high foot-traffic locations around the city (which were wildly unsuccessful) and created a poster board

detailing my research for a women's health fair at the Kenora Shopper's Mall in February, 2012. However, after the first few interviews, participants were overwhelmingly identified through the snowball method (Berg, 2004).

### **1.1.7 Data collection**

The data collection procedures I employed are common to qualitative methods because they draw out detailed, contextual information and give participants a meaningful opportunity to be partners in the research rather than subjects.

Throughout my research, I utilized opportunities for *participant observation* as a window into the lives and experiences of those involved in the project as well as to gain insight into their relationship with water. *Semi-structured interviews* were the primary method of data collection, used to discuss that relationship as well as concerns and other issues women felt were relevant in the context of culture and water governance. *Modified workshops*, formulated from tenets of focus groups and sharing circles, were used to further delve into themes addressed in the individual interviews, with the purpose of revealing knowledge that flows from a group dynamic.

### **1.1.8 Data analysis**

I began from a place of acknowledging my advocacy/participatory worldview and desire to engage in ethnographic research, and used these as guides during my data analysis phase. All interviews were transcribed, a process that began to expose common themes, and QSR NVivo 9 software was subsequently used to organize the transcribed data.

### **1.1.9 Thesis organization**

This thesis is organized into six chapters. The first (introductory) chapter provides an overview of the research and an explanation of key ideas. The second chapter is the literature

review: a more in-depth exploration of water governance, Aboriginal perspectives on water (particularly women's), and women's unique relationship with water. The third chapter details my philosophical worldview, choice of strategy of inquiry, and data collection procedures chosen to fulfill my goals and objectives. The fourth chapter begins with a description of the social context of Kenora and transitions to a discussion of my data on women's knowledge, teachings, stories and concerns. The fifth chapter focuses on water governance and shared learning. The sixth and final chapter addresses conclusions, insights and recommendations.

## CHAPTER TWO: WATER, GOVERNANCE AND FIRST NATIONS

### 2.1 WATER MANAGEMENT IN CANADA

*Considering its importance to all life on earth, it is strange that freshwater has been our most mistreated and ignored natural resource (Schindler et al., 2001, p. 18).*

This sentiment from Schindler et al. illuminates the urgency of reconceptualizing water management in Canada, a process which has only recently begun to take root.

The prevailing model in Canada has been license allocation to municipal and private interests, generally on a ‘priority’ basis (Laidlaw and Passelac-Ross, 2010). Prior to the 1960s and 70s, water had not traditionally been a hot political issue, but around that time began to creep onto the agenda in response to growing demand and increasing realization of its finiteness, the impacts of growth, and public expectations for management (Ramin, 2004). Between 1965 and 1975, legal frameworks and institutional arrangements were formed; in 1984, a review of federal water policies was conducted by the Minister of Environment in an attempt to quell the confusion surrounding the federal government’s role and responsibilities and to respond to issues such as toxic substances and exports. As a result, in 1987, Environment Canada released its *Federal Water Policy* consisting of five strategies: water pricing, public awareness, science leadership, integrated planning, and legislation. These were buttressed by 25 supporting policies. The *Federal Water Policy* advocated for an holistic and integrated approach and recognized the importance of including a multiplicity of stakeholders, among other features (Ramin, 2004).

Despite the government’s seemingly forward thinking in 1987, Canada still lacks a meaningful national water framework and measurable legislated standards (particularly in regards to drinking water). Provincial statutes have filled in many gaps in water management, but consistency has yet to be achieved. This has much to do with the fact that Canada’s

Constitution has entrenched shared responsibility for certain water uses, resulting in jurisdictional wrangling. Broadly speaking, the federal government has jurisdiction over areas such as inland fisheries, navigation and shipping, federal or interprovincial “works and undertakings”, canals, harbours, rivers and lake improvements, and “Indians” and land reserved for Indians. The provinces have legislative authority over local works and undertakings, municipalities, regulation of the use of property, proprietary powers over provincial Crown land, and ownership and development of natural resources. All of these categories contain at least an element of water management. It is a natural consequence of provincial jurisdiction that the provinces will exercise management in ways that are not harmonious. Finally, Aboriginal governments, territorial governments, and municipalities exercise control over some aspects of water (Nowlan, 2004). It must be noted that almost all Indigenous Peoples disagree with both provincial assertion of authority over water and the entrenched view that water can be owned (Phare, 2009).

The backdrop to this patchwork is our Western culture’s propagation of the “myth of superabundance” (Ramin, 2004), which continues to promote abuse and overuse of our water resources.

The importance of Canada’s water cannot be understated: “Approximately 9 per cent of Canada’s total area is covered by fresh water and Canadian rivers discharge 7 per cent of the global supply of renewable freshwater resources annually” (Ramin, 2004, p. 2). The Assembly of First Nations (2008) has sounded the alarm bell on over-allocation, noting that more than 100 per cent of our water resources are used for extraction, ignoring any considerations of watersheds’ natural requirements to maintain ecosystem health. The crises facing water sources in Canada have been compounded by the insidious effects of climate change which are rapidly

altering our land and waterscapes (The First Nations Water Security and Climate Change Workshop Report, 2010).

## **2.2 GOVERNANCE: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Governance as a concept is shaping discourse in the international arena in a host of settings, including but not limited to relations between nations, the functioning of business models, and the approach to environmental stewardship (de Loë et al., 2009). Broadly speaking, literature on governance uses the term to describe "...the different ways in which societies can organize themselves to accomplish a goal..." (de Loë et al., 2009, p. 1). Fundamentally, an embrace of governance approaches is accompanied by a recognition that the state cannot, and should not, be the sole decision-making body, particularly in regards to environmental management (Bryant and Wilson, 1998; Plummer and Armitage, 2007b). This stems from the fact that governments face capacity limitations and that environmental issues are generally mired in complexity (de Loë et al., 2009). But in general, a move towards governance reflects a more widespread inclination in public policy to revise the hierarchical model (Mayntz, 1998).

While often hailed as a panacea, one of the challenges (and opportunities) for governance is the lack of clear definition. Some scholars contend that governance can range from financial accountability and administrative efficiency to questions of democracy, human rights and participation in political processes (Rogers and Hall, 2003). Others take the stance that governance can emerge from political actors exerting themselves through regulatory processes, mechanisms and organizations to participate in the environmental decision-making process (Lemos and Agrawal, 2006). Still others approach the term loosely, suggesting it can include all institutional solutions to environmental management problems (Paavola, 2007). The World

Resources Institute (2003), an influential environmental think tank, simply defines governance as encompassing the “...processes and institutions through which societies make decisions that affect the environment”, adding that these could include decisions reached through markets, co-management agreements, corporations, non-governmental organizations, public-private partnerships and quasi-governmental boards. Some features that most definitions of governance share are the necessity of engaging and accommodating a diversity of views, encouraging group decision-making and shared learning, and building networks of partnerships (de Loë et al., 2009).

Practically speaking, governance is also about navigating and balancing laws and regulations with public interests and political and economic realities (Rogers and Hall, 2003). However, while a legal framework and regulations often preface, and therefore inform governance initiatives, the concept of governance is also about redefining the relationship between the public and the state. Rhodes (1997) notes that this can take the form of public self-organization or the creation of networks characterized by interdependence as well as shared goals and “rules of the game”. Ultimately, these types of organizational structures serve to empower citizens to take ownership of governance over resources and act autonomously from the state (Rhodes, 1997). The question of striking the right balance between the legal framework, the public, and political and economic realities also finds governance-based responses in the creation of innovative institutions or institutional arrangements that facilitate group decision-making and collective action (Lemos and Agrawal, 2006; Ostrom, 2007; Ali-Khan and Mulvihill, 2008; Armitage et al., 2009; de Loë et al., 2009).



## 2.3 WATER GOVERNANCE

While generally accepted as a desirable approach to the management of most resources, new governance has emerged as critical with regards to water. This is reflective of the fact that many water problems are the result of human activity and a historically fragmented method of management (Ingram, 2008; Biermann, et al., 2009; de Loë et al., 2009). It also takes into consideration the need to ask hard questions about sustainable use of water, how equitable allocation should be achieved, and how economic goals and environmental protection should be weighed against each other. In an attempt to unite these concepts, a common definition of water governance is “[t]he range of political, social, economic and administrative systems that are in place to develop and manage water resources, and the delivery of water services, at different levels of society” (Rogers and Hall, 2003, p. 16, citing The Global Water Partnership, 2000).

Management can be especially complex because water knows no physical or political boundaries. Blomquist and Schlager (2005) and Grigg (2008) have charged that limiting a governance model to a watershed is unsuitable because it fails to consider the economic and social units that extend beyond the hydrologic scale of the watershed. Ramin (2004) adds that these social and economic units include areas of mutual concern, making the possibility of effective governance more likely. Regardless of the unit, de Loë et al. (2009) argue that governance is the most appropriate approach to water because it emphasizes the need for management models to be adaptive and flexible in response to complexity and a large number of players. Among its main tenets include the push for all players and processes to be open and transparent as well as inclusive and communicative. Actions, policies and management techniques should be coherent and integrated. Above all – and perhaps the most significant departure from traditional water policy – it should stress the importance of fair and ethical

management (Rogers and Hall, 2003). These principles take shape differently depending on the context. Rogers and Hall (2003) note that water governance must be highly sensitive to the ethical principles and rule of law of the society that has adopted the approach. And there's the rub: in Canada, resource management is moving incrementally in the direction of including both non-First Nation and First Nation perspectives, but these have been traditionally at odds on issues of ethics and conceptions of law. This will be explored in depth later in this chapter, but at this point it is worth highlighting that these conflicting views on ethics and law manifest in broader issues of power, justice, property rights and ownership (Rogers and Hall, 2003) – another layer in an already complicated process and often at the heart of new water governance initiatives in Canada.

Rogers and Hall (2003) also offer comments on the principles of water governance performance and operation, noting that to be effective the approach should have built-in accountability checks and balances and should be responsive and sustainable; this translates into defining clear and reachable objectives, planning for the future and reflecting on the past. de Loë et al. (2009) introduce the importance of relationships to the conversation, noting that legitimacy, another key feature of governance performance and operation, hinges on experience, history and trust among actors. Studies undertaken by Gearey and Jeffrey (2006) and Connelly et al. (2006) emphasize that meaningful dialogue between participants is essential to achieving legitimacy, and that simply creating a space in which participants can ask one another whether the process decided upon is acceptable given the context may be a useful starting point.

In their evaluation of the conditions necessary to achieve effective water governance, Rogers and Hall (2003, p. 20) impart valuable lessons relevant to this research and the *Common Ground* generally: 1) an enabling environment that facilitates private and public sector

partnerships must be created, with space made for participants to articulate needs; and 2) "...a framework (institutional and administrative) within which strangers or people with different interests can peacefully discuss and agree to cooperate and co-ordinate their actions" will lay the foundation for long-term sustainability.

### **2.3.1 Water rights and legal bases pertinent to governance**

Because water has been largely absent from environmental policy dialogue in Canada until recently, the question of water rights remains unanswered. While there now is a push to formalize water rights, Rogers and Hall (2003, p. 17) note that this "...raises complex questions about the plurality of claims and the balancing of the distribution of benefits among...social groups." Moreover, this process often unfolds in favour of those already in power and unwilling to share rights (Rogers and Hall, 2003; Phare, 2009). In response, many groups are advocating for the recognition of informal rights – those defined over time by local historical rules and principles (Rogers and Hall, 2003). This can result in a dichotomy that breeds another challenge for governance initiatives: the conflict between formal and traditional water rights (Rogers and Hall, 2003).

This conundrum is most pronounced in the context of First Nations' views on water. This will be addressed in-depth in a following section, but at this juncture it should be noted that Western conceptions of governance tend to support a role for the state in defining property and user rights and responsibilities. This approach is grounded in ideas of land use and land ownership (Rogers and Hall, 2003). In contrast, firm followers of the Anishinaabe way of life take a different view. Aaron Mills (2010) emphasizes that Anishinaabe law works in terms of boundaries. Features of the land (and water) are to be considered our relatives with their own agency, incapable of being possessed (Mills, 2010; Dannenmann, 2006). While conflict does not

always exist between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal conceptions of governance, it can arise when disparate worldviews conceptualize rights and responsibilities and what they mean to water governance.

### **2.3.2 Shared learning and water governance**

As mentioned earlier, governance also encompasses shared learning, which is fundamental to overcoming the effects of unequal power amongst governance actors and to building holistic systems of knowledge transmission and understanding (de Loë et al., 2009). These elements can begin to address the ambiguity inherent in water management.

The inclusion of multiple actors (state, non-state, public and private) is considered to be a prerequisite to effective and collaborative learning (de Loë et al., 2009). Multiple actors bring varied perspectives to the table, and through communication "...[develop]... shared meanings and values that provide a basis for joint action" (Pahl-Wostl et al., 2007, n.p.). de Loë et al. (2009) similarly note that this process leads to an holistic, systems-oriented understanding – an approach in which non-state actors move beyond their traditional roles as knowledge recipients and actively become knowledge generators.

In their work on social learning concepts, Pahl-Wostl et al. (2007) found that social relations are inextricably linked to resources management issues, and so provide the foundation for shared learning. For example, social relations and processes help define the problem, the type of ground rules and negotiation tactics, and the role of leadership in the process (Pahl-Wostl et al., 2007). They also assert that group learning pertaining to water management occurs at three temporal scales: first, on short to medium time scales (micro), during which actors with different interests begin to interact; second, on medium to long time scales (meso), during which

water management regimes begin to consist of more or less organized participant groups who engage in interaction and effect change in the actor network, and; third, on long time scales (macro), during which the governance structure (formal and informal institutions, power configurations and cultural values and norms) takes shape (Pahl-Wostl et al., 2007). It is necessary to note that the social context underpins these processes; Pahl-Wostl et al. (2007, n.p.) argue that “[i]t is assumed that long-term changes in governance structure and underlying values and paradigms cannot occur within a water management regime in isolation from the societal context.” However, because social relations are not always harmonious, de Loë et al. (2009) suggest that the success of addressing water management issues rests on the ability of actors in a given social context to try to foster respect for, and trust in, plural knowledge systems. Furthermore, Simms and de Loë (2010) advise that participants wanting to ensure inclusive governance schemes must put effort into creating fora that are conducive to generating respect and trust. They note that the cost of space, facilitation and time can be barriers that aggravate conflicts that already exist between participants. They add that frustrations due to power imbalances combined with situations of marginalization can also impede social learning (Simms and de Loë, 2010). But, if participants carefully consider these issues and genuinely attempt to address obstacles to shared learning at the outset, the process can lead to authentic “knowledge co-production” (de Loë et al., 2009).

## **2.4 Water Management in Ontario**

Earlier I briefly considered Canada’s approach to water management, a history that has shaped how some provinces have dealt with their water resources. Because my research took place in Ontario, reflection on the province’s experience is also helpful.

Ontario's formal water policies began in 1946 when water management agencies were created by statute (Ramin, 2004). From the beginning, fragmentation of responsibilities along agency lines was common, leading to management being primarily confined to issues of flood control and erosion (Mitchell, 1986). However, conservation authorities in Ontario have been developed in a way that attempts many of the vital new governance principles. Shrubsole and Mitchell (1992) and Shrubsole (1996) note that chief among these principles is a commitment to the notion that effective management is predicated on establishing partnerships with local communities; conservation authorities were only created in the province after interest was voiced and consent given by local governments. Further, water-centered activities undertaken by conservation authorities have been conducted collaboratively between local and provincial governments, and with a focus on linking economic development with resource management, e.g. a focus on flood damage and erosion control has helped to sustain forestry and fishery activities in staples communities (Shrubsole and Mitchell, 1992; Shrubsole, 1996). Finally, conservation authorities have made an effort to lead activities that are holistic in nature, recognizing land and water interactions, such as reforestation (Shrubsole and Mitchell, 1992; Shrubsole, 1996). It should be noted, however, that these conservation authority activities are taking place in the Lakehead Region, not Kenora.

Ontario's Source Water Protection (SWP) planning serves as both an example of how governance can begin to take shape in a given region and one of the pitfalls of which to be aware. According to Simms and de Loë (2010, p. 9), "SWP planning involves identifying surface water intake protection zones and wellhead protection areas, with different sensitivity zones based on the time and path of water travel", with the intent of protecting drinking water. This planning is coordinated and directed by Source Protection Authorities (the province's

existing Conservation Authorities) but is guided by Source Protection Committees, which are comprised of representatives from agriculture, the municipal government, business, residents and some others (Simms and de Loë, 2010). Participants must go through formal steps (development of terms of reference, creation of watershed assessment reports and source water protection plans) in the planning process that are designed to ensure accountability, but Simms and de Loë (2010) have noted that putting pen to paper does not necessarily translate into tangible accountability. In this case, they found that municipalities face real challenges regarding accountability, such as the whims of councillors and election pressures.

So, while the first initiatives mentioned (flood damage and erosion control) do indicate a certain level of commitment to water governance (at least in the Lakehead Region of the province), the latter example points to gaps in terms of legitimacy, sustainability and meaningful participation of actors. I also note that the history and experiences I have examined in this section are still told from a Western perspective. The following sections detail how First Nations, particularly in Ontario, have viewed water management and how they perceive governance moving into the future.

## **2.5 FIRST NATIONS AND WATER**

### **2.5.1 First Nations' Water Rights and the State of Water in First Nations Communities**

A critical starting point for any discussion on First Nations and water in Canada is a look into First Nations' rights generally, and the potential for water rights specifically.

In her influential examination of the impact that existing legal frameworks have on First Nations' water rights in Canada, Phare (2009) reminds us of a shameful truth: First Nations are not mentioned as co-founders of Canada in our Constitution, but rather as the “responsibility” of

the Federal Government. This classification has not only robbed many Aboriginal people of their culture, autonomy and way of life, but has also had grave implications for their ability to exercise influence over any kind of decision-making processes. She notes that while Aboriginal and treaty rights were crystallized under section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, "...they (First Nations) are still fighting legal and political battles to have a seat at the decision-making table" (Phare, 2009, p. 28). While First Nations applaud the fact that some courts have upheld these rights (see *R v Sparrow*; *Claxton v Saanichton Marina*; *Haida Nation v British Columbia (Minster of Forests)*); and the Piikani Nation's settlement with the Alberta and Canadian governments [see Phare, 2009]), many simultaneously feel it is a battle that is misdirected; they understand their rights to be inherent, bestowed and guided by the Creator's laws and responsibilities (Phare, 2009; First Nations Water Security and Climate Change Workshop Report, 2010; Laidlaw and Passelac-Ross, 2010).

First Nations' struggle for control of water resources is set against these conflicting conceptualizations of rights and laws. Phare (2009) points to this as the obvious challenge: the courts outwardly recognize both systems of law, but there is no guidebook on interpreting and applying Indigenous legal traditions. Moreover, they currently must exist within the confines of the common law – the law that is applied by Canadian courts. Fundamentally, our legal system is premised on the privileging of liberal ideology and property rights, so the idea of inherent water rights, laws and responsibilities as gifted by the Creator is often alien to Western culture and treated as subordinate.

So, Aboriginal rights continue to be defined by non-Aboriginal society and are confined to a limited number of categories. The first category *is* an interpretation of inherent rights (title), but a contested one: Indigenous Peoples often assert that title would include rights to water (on



the basis that they held title before Canada was created), and that these rights were never relinquished. However, since the Supreme Court articulated the test for title in *Delgamuukw v British Columbia* in 1997, no Aboriginal Nation has been successful in establishing title (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2010; Cameron, 2012). Establishing title would give a First Nation a broad right to water on title land. As Laidlaw and Passelac-Ross (2010, p. 19) note, “[i]nsofar as water is considered an integral part of the land, then Aboriginal title gives Aboriginal Peoples the right to the lands submerged by water and entitles them to make use of the waters for a wide variety of purposes not restricted to traditional occupations.”

The second category is land-use rights and rights to a traditional livelihood (Laidlaw and Passelac-Ross, 2010; von der Porten and de Loë, 2010). This guarantees a right to retain the ability to live off the land, including hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering, and to water usage for domestic, cultural, spiritual and ceremonial purposes (Laidlaw and Passelac-Ross, 2010). Because water is indivisible from these activities, many First Nations assert that water rights are a natural component of land-use rights (Assembly of First Nations, 2008). In *R v Sappier; R v Gray*, the Supreme Court clarified that “[a] practice undertaken for survival purposes can be considered integral to an Aboriginal community’s distinctive culture” (p. 5). Because harvesting fish or seafood is integral to physical and spiritual survival and cannot occur without healthy water, Aboriginals may, by extension, have a protected right to water. Phare advocates for a variation on this approach as well. While she tempers the argument by acknowledging that the provinces tend to manage water (and thus exercise water rights), she asserts that they do not do so with the maintenance of First Nations’ rights in mind. She suggests that an alternative category of rights could be established based on rights holders engaging in water-related activities which are “necessarily incidental” to existing treaty and Aboriginal rights.

(“Necessarily incidental” refers to protected activities that accompany the exercise of Aboriginal and treaty rights.)

The third category is treaty rights. These pertain to the use of water for agricultural, commercial and industrial purposes on reserve land (Laidlaw and Passelac-Ross, 2010). In terms of water, some treaties contain language around water and others do not. Laidlaw and Passelac-Ross (2010, p. 22) contend that “...treaties contained no express reference to water or water rights in the surrender or in the reservation of lands, but declared that the object of the reserves was to encourage agriculture and cattle raising”, thus ensuring that water rights would carry through with these and related activities. Phare’s (2009, p. 54) interpretation is different. She insists that another argument can be advanced: that “...when reserves and treaty lands were created they included the right to use water.” Even in the absence of specific language, some Aboriginal Nations contend that the Canadian legal system should find a right to water on reserves through applying the *Winters* doctrine (from American jurisprudence), which recognizes reserve-based water rights because reserves are (often) creatures of treaty. Central to this idea is that the promises enshrined in treaties cannot be realized without water. The doctrine established that a “first in line, first in right” system does not supersede treaty or inherent rights (Nowlan, 2004). The problem that Aboriginal Peoples face in trying to assert this category of water rights is that all of the provincial governments, with the exception of Ontario and Prince Edward Island, have asserted a propriety right to water as a result of the transfer of land to them through the *Constitution Act, 1867*, for the four original provinces, or subsequent legislation for the other provinces that joined successively (Phare, 2009).

The last category is riparian rights and ownership of waterbeds on reserve lands. Riparian rights include domestic use and secondary uses such as irrigation and even

manufacturing, the right to access and drain water, and to ensure that water is of a sufficient quantity and quality (Passelac-Ross and Smith, 2010). The riparian doctrine presumed ownership by nearby land owners of the bed of non-tidal rivers and streams to the centre thread or channel, and to the high-water mark for tidal waters (Laidlaw and Passelac-Ross, 2010; Passelac-Ross and Smith, 2010). Laidlaw and Passelac-Ross (2010, p. 22) explain: “[b]ecause reserve lands are held for the use and benefit of the respective First Nations, First Nations are the lawful riparian land owners and holders of riparian rights.” This seems to be in place in Ontario. While the *Northwest Irrigation Act, 1894*, gave the Crown ownership and the authority to allocate water (effectively replacing the doctrine), Ontario and Eastern Canada did not follow suit with other provinces that subsequently passed legislation to vest ownership of water in the Provincial Crown (Nowlan, 2004).

Waterbed ownership rights would include the right to hunt, trap and fish over the waters, to erect wharfs, bridges and dams, and to initiate diversion projects. This too is contentious because there is conflict between the provincial governments and reserve communities as to who actually has a proprietary interest in waterbeds (Passelac-Ross and Smith, 2010).

In sum, despite the existence of some established rights, they have yet to be extended to water. First Nations still do not control the waters they reside by (most are administered by the federal government), and according to Phare (2009), 90 per cent of First Nations communities in Canada live in close proximity to water bodies. The denial of these rights is even more serious when the state of water resources in many Aboriginal communities is considered. For example, as of January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2013, 113 First Nations were under a federal drinking water advisory (Health Canada, First Nations & Inuit Health, 2013), stemming from water that was contaminated with uranium or unacceptable levels of bacteria, or that was discoloured and foul-smelling. In many

cases the ill-health of the water has been linked to high rates of cancer or fish deformities (Phare, 2009). Other assessments are more damning in their opinion of how mismanaged water negatively affects First Nations, highlighting pollution, habitat damage, flooding of traditional lands, forced relocations and estrangement from water (Nowlan, 2004). Furthermore, the effects of climate change are beginning to add another challenging layer to the issue of First Nations' control over their water resources. While not significant contributors to climate change, First Nations (particularly in Northern Canada) are often the first to experience its effects (Thompson, 2005). The First Nations Water Security and Climate Change Workshop Report (2010) articulated that many communities are plagued with increasing droughts, rapid glacier melts, thawing of permafrost, and overall changes in the marine ecosystems that are significantly altering their relationship with the water and their way of life.

### **2.5.2 Western and Aboriginal Perspectives on Water**

The above section detailed the fundamental issues associated with interpretations of laws governing water. Informing the discussion of water rights is a stark difference in worldviews relating to how both Aboriginal and Western cultures perceive water.

Western culture generally understands water to be an essential part of the physical environment and fundamental to the functioning of an ecosystem (Blackstock, 2001). While it is valued, it is perceived as an inert entity that interacts with the living world (Blackstock, 2001). This interpretation is science-based, separate from the functioning of a society or community. Berkes (2008) refers to this as the nature/culture and subject/object dichotomy.

In Aboriginal culture, however, water symbolizes the element from which all else came and will return, a living force and the centre of life rather than simply a component of it

(Blackstock, 2001; McGregor and Whitaker, 2001). McGregor and Whitaker (2001) note that – as evidence of Berkes’ dichotomy – it is difficult for Western science to understand this relationship because in it, life and water are inseparable. Rather, water *is* life (McGregor and Whitaker, 2001).

First Nations also hold that water is integral to cultural and spiritual survival and is an inextricable link to one’s ancestors (McGregor and Whitaker, 2001). Lavalley (2006) notes that the roles and responsibilities surrounding household collection and use of water have been passed down through generations, indicating an historical tie between water and identity. It is also seen as a key component in the re-building of First Nations and their healing journey as a People (McGregor and Whitaker, 2001).

In the Anishinaabe tradition, water is one of the four elements – earth, fire, wind and water – made by the Creator (McGregor and Whitaker, 2001). Because all other Creation is derived from these elements, each must be respected with the highest appreciation. The four elements are also conceived of as “place”, which the Anishinaabe identify strongly with. This refers not just to a physical place, but an all-encompassing relationship with the elements. Without these elements, cultural impoverishment and physical demise is inevitable (Jacobs, 1998; Chiefs of Ontario, 2001). Water, as the “lifeblood” of Mother Earth (and a living and conscious being), must be kept clean so it can continue to fulfill its own purpose (Blackstock, 2001; McGregor and Whitaker, 2001; von der Porten and de Loë, 2010).

This stewardship responsibility fundamentally characterizes First Nations’ relationship with the environment and guides governance (Phare, 2009). Laidlaw and Passelac-Ross (2010, p. 19) assert that, for Aboriginal people, “[t]he use of waters is governed by a natural law, by

which the taking of waters without due regard to the environment and the needs of current and future generations can only lead to disaster.” Dannenmann (2008, p. 214), writing specifically about her relationship with Trout Lake, adds more complexity to the above concept: “...Trout Lake is...part of our great Mother the earth with which we have a very special relationship. This relationship includes those with whom we share that home – our aunts, cousins...the moose, bear, gulls, ravens, mice, moles, flies, mosquitoes, fish, the trees, the grass and rocks. [This] relationship is characterized by a spirituality and sacredness, an intimate knowledge and huge reciprocal respect and reverence where we all know our rights and responsibilities.” Key governance principles rest on this conceptualization of water and natural law, such as the need to view water management holistically, respecting the link between past and present, and the importance of embracing Aboriginal knowledge and sharing that knowledge in moving forward with water governance (McGregor and Whitaker, 2001).

## **2.6 WOMEN, NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT AND WATER**

Women of all backgrounds have historically been underrepresented in environmental policy-making (Hessing et al., 2005), First Nations more so than others. Some scholars (Vincent, 2003; Brewster et al., 2006) note that managing natural resources is about power relations; without holding power in a given society, women have been unable to effect changes to water management.

This is often the result of women’s relationship with water (and other resources) being a product of their place in society. In most cultures, “women’s” work revolves around water: they collect it, prepare and cook food with it, provide care for children, the sick and the elderly, and do the lion’s share of the cleaning and washing (Kattau, 2006; National Network for

Environments and Women's Health, 2009). Because of this relationship, any approach to water governance should intuitively look to women. However, Gerrard (2009/2010) points out that a gendered analysis is generally omitted from water management, and when it is included, it is relegated to concerns of care-giving and having babies. She advocates the need for research to explore the social and cultural aspects of women's relationship with water (Gerrard, 2009/2010).

### **2.6.1 Aboriginal Women and Water**

*The Earth is said to be a woman. In this way it is understood that woman preceded man on the Earth. She is called Mother Earth because from her come all living things. Water is her lifeblood. It flows through her, nourishes her, and purifies her* (Benton-Banai, 1988, p. 2).

The above quote captures the Anishinaabe view on water, but irrespective of differences in belief systems, women's special relationship with water is shared by most Indigenous societies (McGregor and Whitaker, 2001; Brewster et al., 2006; Kattau, 2006; von der Porten and de Loë, 2010). This connection supports a prominent role for women in water governance.

In 2008, the Chiefs of Ontario created a Water Declaration of the First Nations in Ontario. A recurring theme throughout the Declaration was women's role as the keepers of the water. This role is rightfully theirs because water is profoundly maternal: women bring babies into the world and many Aboriginal cultures view water (in the womb) as the first environment for life and the "breaking of the water" shortly before birth as solely feminine (McGregor and Whitaker, 2001; Kattau, 2006; McGuire, 2006; Chiefs of Ontario Water Declaration, 2008). In Anishinaabe culture, women identify with the moon and speak of it as "Grandmother" (McGregor, 2008). Grandmother moon represents continuous universal birth and renewal (McGregor, 2008). Cook (1999, p. 139-140) illuminates the deep interconnectedness between the moon, water and life:

*She has a special relationship to the waters of the Earth, big and small. From the waters at the doors of life, such as the follicular fluid that bathes the primordial ovum, the dew on the grass in the dawn and at dusk, to the waters of the great oceans, she causes them all to rise and fall. Her constant ebb and flow teaches us that all Creation is related, made of one breath, one water, one earth. The waters of the earth and the waters of our bodies are one. Breastmilk is formed from the blood of the woman. Our milk, our blood and the waters of the earth are one water, all flowing in rhythm to the moon.*

So, in the Aboriginal worldview the properties and energies associated with water are deeply equated with the female (Anderson, 2000). While male symbols and elements (Father Sky and Brother Sun) figure prominently in many teachings and the balance between water and fire is greatly respected, water is seen as possessing more power because of its ability to determine life (Anderson, 2000). Some Aboriginal teachings also impart the idea that water is the bloodline of Mother Earth, and like blood, water carries sustenance to the rest of creation (McGregor and Whitaker, 2001).

In Aboriginal cultures that hold these beliefs, women, as the keepers of wisdom of the water, share their knowledge through teachings and stories (Common Ground Annual General Meeting, 2010). Interestingly, Minh-ha (1989) and Kattau (2006) assert that the process of passing on this knowledge is linked to water in a metaphorical and feminized way: the storyteller can be compared to water as a being who defies categorization and encompasses immense power and wisdom.

In addition to Aboriginal belief systems such as the Anishinaabe and Métis perspectives, women are also connected to water (as in other societies) through socioeconomic status and the gendered division of labour, as mentioned. Among Aboriginal people, women's concerns about environmental degradation are heeded because as the caregivers of the children and elderly, they are often the first to notice when something is amiss (McGregor and Whitaker, 2001). Also, because women, children and the elderly are often the most economically vulnerable members of



a population, they can be amongst the most sensitive to water contamination (McGregor and Whitaker, 2001; National Network for Environments and Women's Health, 2009).

Despite their depth and wealth of knowledge and understanding, many Aboriginal women continue to be marginalized from water management. Unfortunately, the experience of women in Ontario has not been markedly different than in other regions or provinces. McGregor (2008) found that Aboriginal women were consistently side-lined from water management processes at the provincial and community level; in many Aboriginal communities she noted that women were denied their inherent connection to water because of Western-imposed water management structures. At the federal level, it is worth noting that in 2006 when (then) Indian and Northern Affairs Canada struck a panel to look at regulatory frameworks to ensure safe drinking water in Aboriginal communities, not a single First Nations woman was appointed (National Network for Environments and Women's Health, 2009). Now, the Federal Government has passed Bill S-8, *The Safe Drinking Water for First Nations Act*, prompting the Canadian Bar Association to submit a comment to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development calling into question the constitutional validity of the Bill (Canadian Bar Association, 2013). Bill S-8 was also criticized by law firm Koch Thornton in a presentation to the Assembly of First Nations as lacking a mandate for government-to-government dialogue and generally undercutting Aboriginal autonomy (Thornton, 2012), not to mention the complete absence of even so much as a nod to the potential contribution of women. This is a glaring example of how government rhetoric and action are often at odds. Barlow (2008, p. 27) affirms that "...the more policy-making about water is moved from local communities...the less power women have to determine who gets it and under what circumstances."

### **2.6.2 Decolonization and Indigenous Knowledge**

Since the arrival of settlers in Canada, a culture of deliberate, systematic attempts to quash Aboriginal worldviews, practices and belief systems has been cultivated (Mercredi and Turpel, 1993). This has greatly undermined Aboriginal forms of governance and self-determination, and makes the case for any research conducted with Aboriginal communities to be driven by a desire to contribute to the decolonization process. For Aboriginals, decolonization is not only a means to reassert themselves as distinct cultural groups, but also to heal from the historical injustices they have experienced as a people. Part of the healing process involves re-establishing the connection with the Creator (Mercredi and Turpel, 1993; Ross, 1996; Cajete, 1999), and for women, reclaiming their role as the keepers of the water can be essential to empowerment (Anderson, 2000).

Because this research seeks to decolonize and empower women on their own terms, drawing out their Indigenous Knowledge (IK) is critical. There is no universal definition of IK, but it generally encompasses a way of knowing that is living and flows through time, is dynamic and holistic, and is rooted in empirical observation, traditional (oral) teachings and revelation (Brant-Castellano, 2000; McGregor and Whitaker, 2001; Kattau, 2006; Ryan, 2007; McGregor, 2009). Anishinaabe scholar Patricia McGuire (2006, p. 221) explains: “Land is the defining and stabilizing feature of the Anishinaabe knowledge systems. Stories about our land compel us to have a personal relationship with it. Land and relationships are central to Indigenous knowledge(s).” Brant-Castellano (2000, p. 24) describes empirical observation as a representation of “converging perspectives from different vantage points over time.” Lavallee (2009) notes that knowledge derived from revelations includes dreams, visions and intuition, and is thought to be spiritual and transmitted through ancestral relationships. Also important to an

understanding of IK is that it is fundamentally about the relationships between people, knowledge, and all of Creation (McGregor, 2009). These relationships confer responsibility through acquiring knowledge, and IK is inseparable from those who hold it (McGregor, 2009).

Despite its firm place within Aboriginal societies, IK is difficult to translate. Houde (2007) argues that inclusion of IK into natural resources management would lead to increased equity and robustness of environmental decision-making, but the question of *how* to incorporate it has not been resolved (McGregor, 2009). Regrettably, it is often regarded by Western science as ancillary in nature; progress must be made on placing it on par with Western ways of knowing while emphasizing the particular strengths of each tradition (McGregor, 2009). Turner (2006) suggests that an impediment to attaining progress is the fact that attempts to incorporate IK into resource management occur within a broader context of colonial relationships between First Nations and non-First Nations, so any attempts at integration must be prefaced by dedication to decolonization.

One of the challenges I faced as a researcher in addressing the issue of decolonization and women was reconciling my (Western) ideas about feminism with Aboriginal perspectives of female empowerment. However, my findings supported the idea that bridges exist between the two worldviews. Particularly, some of the arguments espoused in ecofeminism are relevant to the decolonization process. For example, ecofeminism maintains that the "...uprooting of Earth-centered ways of relating to nature has had particular impact on women, since in both Western and non-Western cultures the natural world [is] characteristically understood as feminine" (Kattau, 2006, p. 118). Similarly, decolonization proponents argue that the contribution of Aboriginal women has been significantly devalued by colonial society and that it has often led to

the “colonization of womanhood”, undermining women’s bodies, roles and beliefs (Anderson, 2004).

## **2.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

Water governance is a complex mosaic, motivated by a desire to abandon rigid, top-down government control models and embrace a multiplicity of perspectives. While still evolving, it is ideally characterized by a move towards more-inclusive dialogue, partnerships built on trust and accountability, shared learning amongst actors, and a respect for informal rights as well as legal frameworks. It seeks not only to ensure that water resources are preserved, but also to change the historic dynamic of relationships between actors on water issues.

First Nations have a significant role to play in water governance. Among the most disadvantaged of all Canadians with respect to water quality, access and rights, theirs is a voice that must inform water governance models in their communities. In particular, Aboriginal women’s special relationship with water has the potential to introduce alternative and more holistic ways to think about water as an entity (and its link with humankind), and to contribute valuable knowledge to its governance.

## CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS

### 3.1 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

This research was entirely qualitative in nature. A qualitative approach was essential to this work because it explored the meaning individuals or communities attribute to certain issues, acknowledging the complexity of relationships, identities and knowledge (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research is typically employed to uncover types of power relationships, cultural beliefs and shared knowledge (Rothe et al., 2009), which is why it was ideal for my project. In qualitative research, the researcher is inextricably part of the process. This is part of a movement away from the idea of the “researcher and researched”, and a recognition that no research is without bias (Lavallee, 2009). Lavallee (2009) extends this to include an appreciation for an Indigenous approach to research. She notes that researchers and participants are not only connected to one another, but to all other living things as well, eliminating the possibility of objectivity (Lavallee, 2009). Qualitative research is also allied with Indigenous research because both approaches challenge researchers to locate themselves within the research. In the Indigenous context, researchers often begin by identifying who they are, where they are from, and who their ancestors are (Lavallee, 2009). While I do not originate from an Indigenous background, I too went through a similar process of reflection as I continually revisited my philosophical worldview and how it influenced my research, and shared some of my history with my participants.

There is a caveat to embracing qualitative inquiry when conducting research with First Nations that I became aware of during the proposal stage and observed throughout my fieldwork. It was that respecting Indigenous ways of knowing also involves acknowledging that First Nations’ knowledge cannot be compartmentalized under Western concepts, including qualitative

paradigms; ways of inquiring and methods used may be qualitative, but Indigenous Knowledge remains outside of Western parameters (Lavallee, 2009). From my observations, I gathered that this is largely due to the depth, historical transmission and way of viewing the world that hinges on profound interconnectedness which simply cannot be understood through the Western experience.

### **3.2 WORLDVIEW**

Guiding my research from its inception is what qualitative scholars refer to as a philosophical worldview or paradigm, defined by Creswell (2009, p. 6) as “...a general orientation about the world and the nature of research.” I believe a researcher’s worldview is the result of lived experience and is shaped by the influence of those around them. The philosophical worldview is generally linked to a researcher’s choice of strategy of inquiry and the methods eventually used to collect data. The worldview that I associate most closely with is the advocacy/participatory paradigm (Creswell, 2009).

Drawing on the works of Marx, Habermas and Freire, the advocacy/participatory school of thought arose during the 1980s and 90s by writers who felt other approaches to research were inadequate in helping marginalized groups acquire the power to change their situations (Creswell, 2009). In advocating for this approach, proponents held that research must be merged with political considerations and the desire to change lives, and that specific obstacles to empowerment must be addressed (Creswell, 2009). Advocacy/participatory research is collaborative in nature, seeking to provide a voice for participants.

I chose this paradigm because I believe it is a reflection of my experiences and core values. As a feminist, I have always been drawn to women's issues with a desire to understand why and how forces oppress in varying circumstances. Since this paradigm is often blended with feminism, critical theory or Indigenous research, each of which contain tenets that agree with my own values, it was the appropriate fit for this project. As I mentioned earlier, I hope this research provided an opportunity for the women who chose to participate to feel that the strength of their wisdom is valued, and that it has begun a conversation that may influence the larger community and the trajectory of water management in the *Common Land, Common Ground*.

### **3.3 STRATEGY OF INQUIRY: ETHNOGRAPHY**

The strategy of inquiry that I used to undertake this research was ethnography, which involves a researcher describing and interpreting the shared values, behaviours, beliefs and language (including discourse) of a particular group. Looking back, my ethnographic approach both supported and exposed challenges in moving towards the *Common Ground Research Forum's* mandate of increasing cross-cultural collaboration. However, ethnography is not only a process; in fact, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) assert that it refers primarily to a particular set of methods. Those generally include participant observation and some version of interviewing (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995).

I perceive ethnography to be more deeply linked to a researcher's worldview, and it thus informed my chosen set of methods. Ethnographic research tends to focus on understanding a community's issues within the broader socioeconomic and political context (Schensul et al., 1999), which is why I felt it was suited to my project: it supported an advocacy/participatory agenda which sought to empower my female participants. Also, I think ethnography was

appropriate for work with Aboriginal communities because it involves extended observation and participation by the researcher to gain an appreciation for the meaning of the behaviour, language and interaction between community members (Creswell, 2007). The long history of mistrust between First Nations and non-First Nations required my prolonged presence in the community to develop a trusting and open relationship with women. Ethnography is also a useful tool in understanding the root causes of a particular problem and assisting community members in clarifying their needs (Schensul et al., 1999), offering another critical link between ethnography as a strategy of inquiry and my philosophical worldview. Finally, I opted to pursue ethnography as my strategy of inquiry because it has expanded in recent years to include feminist and critical theory considerations (Creswell, 2009), further affirming the need to address the political context and use the strategy of inquiry to advocate for the emancipation of groups marginalized in society (Creswell, 2007). Through including these perspectives, my role as a researcher involved exploring issues of power, inequality, dominance and repression (Creswell, 2007).

However, I was cognizant throughout my research that ethnography is not without its drawbacks. Generally speaking, one of the main critiques of ethnographic research is that it is limited in its generalizability because it only focuses on a single case (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). While I would agree that the particular set of circumstances will always be unique, if research uncovers issues of oppression and marginalization, I would argue that its lessons can be more widely applicable as these often have similar root causes. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) also note that there is a danger in assuming homogeneity within a group, which is something to which I became alert. It can be easy to assume that members of a cultural community – in this case Anishinaabe and Métis women – share the same views, but as I



discovered, personal experiences and histories profoundly shape an individual's worldview, let alone those of a "group". A more serious concern, in the context of my research, is raised by Stacey (1988). She warns that although tempting (particularly for feminists), it is premature to assume that ethnography naturally promotes "feminine" capacities such as intuition, respect, empathy and relationship (Stacey, 1988). Instead, she argues, the ethnographic process can leave participants open to greater risk of manipulation and betrayal than traditional quantitative research because of the level of intimacy and the inability of participants to leave the situation once the research has been completed (Stacey, 1988). This was a critical point for me because of the long-standing negative relationship between First Nations and non-First Nations that I remarked on earlier; I endeavoured to tread lightly and continued to make every attempt to ensure that my participants felt they were also owners of the ethnographic research process and this final product. Stacey (1988, p. 26) suggests that perhaps "...an uneasy fusion of feminist and critical ethnographic consciousness may allow us to construct cultural accounts that, however partial and idiosyncratic, can achieve...contextuality, depth, and nuance." I believe this statement is generally accurate in the context of my research. I was privileged enough to gather very rich cultural information from women about water. My appreciation of this knowledge came from my brand of feminism that values the contribution of all women, and by viewing the information shared with me through an ethnographic window.

### **3.4 DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES**

My data collection strategies were derived from both my philosophical worldview and strategy of inquiry, and from an appreciation of the need to select strategies that would be acceptable to Anishinaabe and Métis women.

I utilized the qualitative strategies of semi-structured interviews, modified workshops (a variation on focus groups and Indigenous sharing circles) and some participant observation to collect data during my fieldwork, which allowed me to acquire powerful, well-rounded information that helped me to satisfy my goals and objectives. The following table (Table 1) displays how each method supported my objectives:

Objective	Data Collection Strategies
<b>1) Record women’s teachings, knowledge and stories about water</b>	Individual semi-structured interviews, modified workshops and participant observation
<b>2) Learn about the concerns women have regarding water in and around their communities</b>	Individual semi-structured interviews and modified workshops
<b>3) Establish the role women have played and are playing in water governance in their communities, including the waters that flow around <i>Common Ground</i></b>	Individual semi-structured interviews, modified workshops and participant observation
<b>4) Identify culturally appropriate opportunities for shared learning about Aboriginal women’s connection to water and their role in its governance</b>	Individual semi-structured interviews and modified workshops

**Table 1: Objectives and related data collection strategies**

### **3.4.1 Participant Observation**

As mentioned, participant observation is one of the cornerstones of ethnographic inquiry. It is based on experiential knowledge gained from immersing oneself in a culture, but also on removing oneself to reflect on experiences (Bernard, 2006). Since I conducted ethnographic research and was committed to acknowledging my biases and place within the research, I was a “participant observer” – mid-point along the continuum of types of observation. Being a participant observer means rejecting the notion that a researcher can remain a dispassionate

complete observer on one end and fully integrate into the community as a complete participant on the other.

Participant observation is often thought of as the starting point for ethnographic research because it is a process of learning through constant exposure to day-to-day community activities (Schensul et al., 1999). It is a starting point because through daily contact trust begins to build (which eventually influences validity) and a researcher becomes privy to observing major community events such as ceremonies, deaths, violence, etc. (Bernard, 2006). One of the strengths of participant observation is that the researcher becomes the instrument for data collection and analysis through their worldview and experiences (Bernard, 2006).

Unfortunately, my participant observation was limited because few water-related community gatherings or meetings took place during my time in Kenora. I regularly read the local paper, the “Daily and Miner and News”, joined an email listserv, checked the Treaty #3 and City of Kenora websites and kept my eyes and ears open, but I found that some events occurred under the mainstream’s radar; I would hear about them after the fact through word of mouth or by reading a follow-up article in the paper. Without having an invitation, it was difficult to find out about and attend such events. But this in itself was a type of observation because it led me to reflect on how information may flow within a tightly-knit community without formal advertisement mechanisms. Conversely, it is also possible that some cultural events were closed to the public, which could have been for any number of reasons, not least of which is that public access could have been deemed inappropriate (which obviously presents a challenge to *Common Ground*). Finally, simply being there during the winter months was a strike against me because it is natural that water-related activities would take a hiatus until the spring thaw. However, I was able to take part in a few key events that, while not always related to water, shed valuable

light on cultural practices and community dynamics. Some were ceremonial or sensitive in nature so I have decided not to share details in this thesis out of respect, but suffice it to say that those experiences allowed me to internalize learning that later gave constructive context to this research. I do believe that attending these events helped me to build trusting relationships but I was not always welcomed with open arms, nor do I think that it would have been realistic to expect that; socioeconomic differences, appearance, language, gender, class background and other defining characteristics can greatly influence the relationship between the researcher and participants (Schensul et al., 1999).

I expected that ceremonies involving water would allow me to observe spiritual ways that women connect with water. The most critical piece of knowledge that I took away from this particular line of observation was the deep union between spirituality and Aboriginal water governance, largely understood as women's roles as water keepers. This is discussed in detail in Chapter Four. I also observed that women who performed water ceremonies were highly revered and made a tremendous impression on those present.

I set out with the intention of observing the dynamics between community members, namely my perceptions about race, gender and power relationships, and how they may be playing out. By and large, I believe I can speak to these issues with a degree of conviction despite the limited nature of my participant observation because my interviews greatly buttressed my observations. I did not, however, have significant opportunities to witness important dynamics between women and men regarding water during this research, which I had hoped to be able to do at the outset.

Finally, I spent some time at “Women’s Place Kenora”, lending a hand and attending events to observe the women who frequent the organization. I was looking for insight into the relationships between women of different walks of life in the community, and whether Anishinaabe and/or Métis culture is prominent in programs and activities focused on women’s empowerment. Again, interviews and conversations that I had with community members also informed my observations from Women’s Place, namely how painstaking it can be to build a trusting relationship between women (also touched on in Chapters Four and Six). These observations were of course not directly related to water, but certainly gave me a sense of how focal the goal of female empowerment is in the activities of Women’s Place, as well as what empowerment might look like to the women who spend time there.

### **3.4.2 Modified Workshops**

Sharing circles are a common method of communication in Aboriginal communities, used to capture people’s experiences and discuss topics in an egalitarian, supportive and non-confrontational manner (Rothe et al., 2007; Lavalley, 2009). They often centre on healing, so every participant’s experience is viewed as equal, and information, spirituality and emotion are shared without judgment (Lavalley, 2009). They are deeply grounded in tradition and oral culture, so as a non-First Nations woman I was not entitled to conduct genuine sharing circles. However, I discovered some literature by scholars who have found innovative ways to use sharing circles and focus groups (a conventional qualitative method) together to create an emergent data collection methodology that is more appropriate to use in an Aboriginal context. While generally referred to as “modified sharing circles”, I chose to use the term “modified workshops” to ensure I would not be misleading participants in any way.

Two important points of departure from traditional focus groups are that modified workshops require deeper involvement from the facilitator and more meaningful input from the participants during the data analysis and interpretation stages (Rothe et al., 2007).

Rothe et al. (2007) recommend that the group interview take place in a natural setting and in accordance with local norms and customs. I chose Women's Place as a known central, safe location – and one that supports women's activities – but I also conducted one very small group interview (with two women) at the Days Inn rental house to accommodate their schedule.

The value of adapting focus groups for use in Aboriginal communities is that they become more culturally sensitive (Rothe et al., 2007), thus breaking down some of the barriers between researcher and participant – snags that can befall conventional focus groups in an Aboriginal setting. Part of this adaptation is developing an appreciation for the importance of narratives in traditional sharing circles. Cruikshank (1990) advises that an essential component of sharing circles in Indigenous societies is story-telling because it is the connection between the individual, community and social processes. Anderson (2004) believes that the process of communicating stories within sharing circles is a way to undo the effects of colonization and create an environment that is safer than individual interviewing. Loppie (2007) also supports this idea, noting that group interaction tends to encourage discussion because participants convey mutual support and shared perspectives. She also comments that group exchange tends to generate somewhat universal benefits, but the dynamics and gains may be unique for older Aboriginal women (Loppie, 2007), which I believe is a result of both culture and their historical marginalization.

Perhaps the most important difference between focus groups and sharing circles that the modified workshop attempts to bridge is embracing the fact that the knowledge participants bring to the discussion is the sum of their life experiences. In my modified workshop, emphasis was placed on sharing the entire chemistry of each individual, including heart, mind, body and spirit (Lavallee, 2009). In addition, several Aboriginal cultural tenets were foundational to the modified workshop I conducted:

- 1) Participants were expected to speak from the heart and express their true feelings;
- 2) Participants were expected to listen respectfully from the heart – without judgment or criticism;
- 3) Participants were to speak spontaneously and not rehearse ahead of time what they planned to say; and
- 4) Participants were to speak leanly, meaning without exaggeration or embellishment (Rothe et al., 2007).

Rothe et al. (2007) maintain that if these commitments are sustained, modified workshop methodology can provide rich information in a culturally sensitive environment, and I believe that in my research it did.

I held one very successful, three-hour modified workshop in January at Women's Place. To my surprise, ten women arrived to participate. (About a month later a second was scheduled in the hopes that the same group could pick up where we left off but only one woman showed.) I had advertised the modified workshop discussion in the January calendar for Women's Place, as well as request that it be circulated in the *Healthy Communities* local email listserv. I also called interviewees who had been keen on the idea when we first met to invite them, and suggested they bring others who might also be interested. Teika Newton, the *CGRF*'s project coordinator, also reached out to some of her Aboriginal contacts and brought along one woman. I made a pot of chili so we could share a meal together during the session. Nancy Morrison opened with a

prayer and a water ceremony and conducted a closing ceremony when we ended for the day. Before beginning, all participants were given a copy of the consent form detailing the project and requesting permission to record the interview, and were asked to sign if they felt comfortable doing so (see Appendix Two). No one objected so I collected the data by recording the discussion. I also left a copy of the consent form with them for their records. Everyone was presented with a gift of tobacco, a blanket and a candle to express my gratitude. Before officially beginning the group interview, I shared with them some information about myself, my background (family and education) and what impassioned me about this project. After the workshop, I transcribed the recording, highlighted important features of each woman's contribution to indicate to every participant what material I was likely to use, and emailed the entire transcript to everyone.

Some of the key questions and themes we explored were the Aboriginal worldview on water, how teachings and knowledge about water are tied to identity and responsibility for water, and their concerns about water. (We were only able to get through half the questions I had planned.) See Appendix Three for my modified workshop guide which directed the discussion.

### **3.4.3 Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were the most lucrative component of my data collection strategy (and helped me identify some participants for the group discussion). I had initially planned to conduct them chiefly as follow-up to the modified workshops, so had accordingly set a goal of interviewing 10-12 individual women. However, once in the field it made better sense to do the reverse: I began interviewing to develop a base of women who would later serve as recruits for the group discussion. While the "snowball" was slow to roll, things picked up



considerably in the new year and I eventually collected data from 19 individual interviews. Of these, four women also participated in the modified workshop.

Like the workshop, interviewees were given a consent form with information about my project and a request for permission to record. This was not distributed prior to meeting as it was logistically difficult (and essentially unnecessary), but before beginning each interview I told participants about myself and my project and invited them to be partners in the research rather than traditional “stakeholders”. See Appendix Four for the individual interview consent form.

The semi-structured interviews allowed me and my interviewees a level of intimacy that set the interviews apart from the dynamics of the group discussion. On average, I spent over an hour with each participant in their home and was humbled by the depth of their spirituality and personal experience they shared with me. Certainly, the individual interviews gave me the chance to dig deeper and uncover their lived experience relating to water as individuals in a way to which a group setting simply is not conducive. Together we explored their connection to water through childbearing and childbirth and related knowledge, teachings and responsibilities they hold on water. We also discussed the interaction between water and identity, which often encompassed memories and historical ties. I asked what could be construed as difficult questions about the relationship between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals in and around Kenora in terms of water, and most answered frankly and without reservation. Finally, we talked about their concerns, ideas about water governance and moving forward in the future. I learned a tremendous amount about the Aboriginal worldview through their answers without asking specifically about it; the consistency with which it was delivered serves as a lesson on how challenges of communication must be framed.

I was fortunate enough to be able to record all of my semi-structured interviews save for three of them. One young woman chose not to be recorded, and two interviews were held in bustling coffee shops so I knew any recording would just be a cacophony of sounds. Instead, I took detailed notes on my laptop while we conversed. Every interview was transcribed and a summary of key points (and in some cases, full transcripts) emailed or hand-delivered to each participant for verification.

Every woman who participated in a semi-structured interview also received a gift for her generosity. Gifts were blankets, slipper socks, towels or hand-made mugs, and a candle, tea or biscuits, and always tobacco.

#### **3.4.4 Overview of Participants**

As indicated, 19 individual interviews and two group discussions (with two and ten participants respectively) were conducted. Of the larger group workshop, four women also engaged in individual interviews, so the total number of participants was 27. All of my participants were women.

I tried very hard to ensure I would have representation from all three communities involved in the *Common Ground* partnership, but was unable to secure even one interviewee from Wauzhushk Onigum. The trials I experienced attempting to connect with the one contact I had in that community provided a real life example of the notion of the “gatekeeper”; I am convinced that had I been able to meet with the one contact, she could have put me in touch with others, but after several failed attempts I realized that I was unlikely to make a connection in that community.

Aside from that hiccup, I was able to include a few women from the other two *Common Ground* communities, Obashkaandagaang and Ochiichagwe’babigo’ining. Most participants were from the town of Kenora, but a few lived in or were raised in neighbouring communities. (I reached a point a few months into my fieldwork when I had to cast my net wider because of initial difficulties generating interest in my project.) The following table (Table 2) is a visual representation of the makeup of my participants. Each column is distinct. The numbers represent my participants organized by community of origin, age, and ethnicity/cultural background:

<b>Community of Residence or Origin</b>	<b>Approximate Age</b>	<b>Ethnicity or Cultural Background</b>
<b>Kenora (12)</b>	<b>18-30 (8)</b>	<b>Anishinaabe (20)</b>
<b>Kenora/Thunder Bay (1)</b>	<b>31-40 (2)</b>	<b>Métis (4)</b>
<b>Kenora/Whitefish Bay (2)</b>	<b>41-50 (5)</b>	<b>Non-Aboriginal (3)</b>
<b>Kenora/Golden Lake (1)</b>	<b>50-59 (9)</b>	
<b>Kenora/Obashkaandagaang (1)</b>	<b>60 + (3)</b>	
<b>Kenora/Rat Portage (1)</b>		
<b>Kenora/Nipigon/Shoal Lake (1)</b>		
<b>Fort Frances (2)</b>		
<b>Ochiichagwe’babigo’ining (4)</b>		
<b>Shoal Lake (1)</b>		
<b>Unknown (1)</b>		

**Table 2: Approximate participant demographics**

None of the above demographic categorizations were solicited by specific questions during conversations with participants, but most spoke of their community of origin and I was aware that most also now reside in Kenora. Ages are an approximate guess (except when it came up in discussion), and ethnicity/background was fairly easily determined through information participants shared with me about their history and belief systems.

#### **3.4.5 A Note on Sample Size**

I should mention that my participant sample size was relatively small, which has implications for the generalizability of my results; doing similar research in another town or region may yield different results. It is valuable to contextualize this. I think this had to do in part with the dynamics between Anishinaabe/Métis people and non-Aboriginal people in Kenora, and the somewhat limited influence of *Common Land, Common Ground* on the consciousness of residents. These two factors speak to some of the tensions that exist between different groups, which seem to be both a catalyst and an obstacle for *CLCG*. In a related way, I also believe the sample size is reflective of the fact that some Aboriginal women are guarded about their knowledge and thus cautious about sharing it (perhaps particularly with non-Aboriginal people such as myself). I think it is truthful to say that several of the women I spoke with were deeply immersed in their culture and proud to share that with me. Many other Anishinaabe and Métis women may not identify as strongly with cultural practices and knowledge, nor would see the value in sharing these for a research project. Conversely, some Anishinaabe and Métis women might have a wealth of knowledge but choose not to share it with non-Aboriginal people for any number of reasons. The fact that most participants were contacted through the snowball method meant that I probably ending up reaching out to like-minded women, and that they felt comfortable talking with me because their friends or relatives already had. Finally, my

experience of trying unsuccessfully to connect with a few women is indicative of the many commitments and responsibilities most women have in their day-to-day lives. This sample size was limited to those who may have had fewer work or family pressures, or who felt that sharing their water knowledge with the broader community was a priority.

In spite of these circumstances, there was diversity amongst participants in my sample size. This was not limited to background, age or community affiliation; participants' interest and devotion to traditional teachings and attitudes toward bridging the divide between Western and Aboriginal knowledge also varied amongst the women I interviewed.

I think it is important to highlight that, despite the small sample size, much of the data echoes the literature on Aboriginal women's knowledge of water and concepts regarding governance.

### **3.5 A NOTE ON UNITING WESTERN AND INDIGENOUS RESEARCH AND INCORPORATING FEMINISM**

Through my literature review, I began to develop an understanding of the marked difference between Western-based qualitative research and Indigenous methods, the former emphasizing conceptual frameworks and thematic expansion and the latter embracing holism, including intuition, dreams and memories (Loppie, 2007). I am appreciative that this research continuously challenged my ways of thinking and beliefs (conscious and subconscious) and required me to engage in meaningful reflection. I believe I emerged as an individual able to see the world through a new set of eyes. Indigenous scholars (Smith, 2000; Brant-Castellano et al.,

2001; Battiste, 2002) assert that in addition to reflection, the practice of using multiple capacities is crucial to learning.

Both Western and Indigenous research evolve over time and acknowledge that reality is a product of human construction – an important shared perspective – but Indigenous research is decidedly non-linear, emphasizing relationships between participants and researchers, and between all involved and the research process (Loppie, 2007).

Feminism may seem to have a tenuous role in Indigenous research, but I believe it coloured my approach in an appropriate way because it seeks to understand the entirety of a woman's experience, which is in line with Indigenous principles of holism (Loppie, 2007). Moreover, if conducted carefully and thoughtfully – as I endeavoured to do – feminist research can spark empowerment by raising consciousness through the process (Loppie, 2007).

Throughout my research, I aimed to validate the accuracy of all my findings. Creswell (2009) suggests several validity techniques that I employed. First, “triangulation” is a term used to describe checking findings from different data collection procedures against each other to build coherent themes. As mentioned, I found data from my participant observation, the modified workshops and the semi-structured interviews to be complementary, resulting in a strong sense of shared themes and consistent messages. Second, through the specific themes and major points I compiled to take back to participants after I had completed my data collection, I attempted to ensure they felt I had captured their sentiments accurately. This is referred to as “member checking” (Creswell, 2009). Creswell (2009) also recommends presenting negative or discrepant information that is contrary to the themes that have emerged from a research project. I cannot say I encountered this issue specifically, but did find myself interviewing women who

had little knowledge of the more traditional aspects of water. Rather, they spoke from a more technical or scientific knowledge base. I am mindful that it would be hugely presumptuous to assume all Anishinaabe or Métis women share the same views on water; I believe including opinions that do not mesh with strong themes has added credibility and alternative perspectives to my research.

Finally, I pushed myself to constantly engage in self-reflection so I could truly understand the biases I brought to this work. Much of this was an iterative process of identifying values that I hold about environmental protection and women's empowerment and seeking to understand how they have formed within me. I had to be honest with myself about certain aspects of my principles that were somewhat Western-centric, and I opened my mind to the new angles I was exposed to through this work. Now, I feel that I straddle two worlds, in a sense; I can appreciate but never possess Indigenous wisdom but have come to reject many non-Aboriginal viewpoints about our earth and water.

### **3.6 DATA ANALYSIS**

My literature review gave me some tentative thematic starting points, which effectively acted as seeds that grew throughout the course of my research. In particular, I was looking for data on the Aboriginal worldview on water, concerns, the role of women in water preservation and management, proposed water governance models and attitudes towards shared learning.

Upon completion of my research and transcription I began to work with the software program QSR NVivo 9 to organize the data and draw out parent and child nodes. Both my ethnographic approach and adherence to the advocacy/participatory paradigm helped guide my

data analysis phase because they acted as a foundational framework within which themes that captured women's knowledge and attitudes towards water took shape. However, the concrete starting point for my data analysis was my objectives. I organized my data into visual models/figures (which appear before each discussion of the results related to my objectives); each objective acted as a "parent node" and the process of sifting through and coding participants' responses produced corresponding "child nodes". My analysis was also underpinned by the literature review completed during my proposal, as well as the experiences that characterized this research, and me. Certain consistent messages that materialized through my interviews warranted parent and child nodes that I had not originally conceived of prior to my fieldwork, but that I would be sorely remiss to exclude from this thesis.

A visual representation of my coded data appears in Chapters Four and Five, followed by an in-depth discussion of what came out of each objective.

### **3.7 RESEARCH LIMITATIONS**

While I believe this project provided an opportunity to a community of women they may not have otherwise had, and that the information they shared with me provided data related to each of my objectives, there are some limitations to this research that I must mention:

- 1) As indicated, I did not have even representation from all the *Common Ground* partner communities.
- 2) Unfortunately, few Elders participated. This was mainly due to difficulties in identifying Elders in the communities involved. With the snowball method, I was limited to individuals whom I contacted through previous interviewees. Also, while the names of a few Elders



came up during the course of conversation with community members, often they were difficult to reach by phone and I was simply unsuccessful in making contact.

- 3) A second limitation stemming from the snowball method was being referred to participants who, while willing to do an interview, had little or no awareness of *Common Ground*. However, I do believe that every one of my participants contributed something valuable to this research, so I would classify this as a negligible limitation.
- 4) I was only able to conduct one larger group interview. I consider this to be a limitation because the tenor of the group discussion at Women's Place was an extremely positive one, and there was much more to be delved into at a later date. But because of the time and effort expended to prepare for a large group, I had to do a cost-benefit analysis in terms of trying any further after only one person came to participate in the planned second workshop. I felt lucky in the end to have been able to hold one group session.
- 5) Finally, while I think it is fair to say that more traditional Aboriginal conceptions of water governance centre on spirituality and ceremony, there are few water governance structures in place where women could play a role. The only formal water governance systems I was aware of during my fieldwork season were the International Joint Commission/Lake of the Woods Water Quality Initiative, cottage owners' associations, and the Lake of the Woods Water Sustainability Foundation (which came up only once during my interviews). In 2012, a workshop was held in Kenora as the first step to establishing a Water Resources Centre (WRC) for the Lake of the Woods and Rainy River watershed. This meeting was attended by municipal and Aboriginal leaders, representatives from educational institutions in Canada and the United States, a member from the *Common Ground Research Forum*, scientists, provincial and state officials, and members of the business community and property owners'

association. Attendees discussed the potential for a Water Resources Centre in Kenora that would focus on “needs around the basin related to water research, data collection and storage, archiving, education and outreach...” (Water Resources Centre Workshop Report, 2012, p. 3). In an embryonic stage, this potential governance structure seems rather serendipitous for women who are eager to become involved in water governance.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RELATIONSHIPS WITH WATER: KNOWLEDGE, TEACHINGS, STORIES AND CONCERNS

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to unpack the wealth of knowledge my participants shared with me about their profound relationship with water. This chapter also contains results on the concerns women shared with me about the waters that flow in and around *Common Ground*. I begin with a reflection on the social context of Kenora in which my research was situated. From there this chapter will reverently explore the data related to women's knowledge, teachings and stories. They are at the very heart of women's concerns and their ideas and opinions about water governance and shared learning.

Because of my strategy of inquiry, I have leaned heavily upon actual excerpts from my data so as to best convey the spirit of the messages as they were given to me. These excerpts are a window into the influence of water on women's bodies, histories and identities. Embedded in this data are unique personal relationships that connect the spiritual, emotional, mental and physical health of the women who were part of this research.

On that note: I mentioned earlier that certain information, conveyed consistently throughout my interviews, warranted parent and child nodes outside of my original framework that was formulated on the basis of my objectives. These pertained to the experience of colonization and how it is an undercurrent that continues to affect women's relationships with water. This discovery was a direct link to my advocacy/participatory worldview and so demands thoughtful exposure.

## 4.2 SOCIAL CONTEXT: KENORA

Earlier I briefly discussed some of Kenora's topographical attributes and historical characteristics, but some participants' sentiments about the social make-up and tensions in the community emerged throughout my time there that shaped this research. I was aware of some of those sentiments before I began my work, but those that arose through conversations and data collection plead for deeper consideration of how they impact the relationships between Anishinaabe, Métis and non-Aboriginal residents. This section broaches these issues based on my observations. I have tried to avoid making general statements about the nature of the community.

I arrived in Kenora somewhat aware of tensions between groups, but under the impression that these trends were becoming a thing of the past. While I am not suggesting I witnessed a great deal of evidence to the contrary, several conversations and observations pointed to the conclusion that Kenora still has a very long road to travel in reaching its goal of a harmonious community.

One such conversation occurred a few months into my stay in Kenora, when an acquaintance's comments about the insularity of the community sparked my thinking on the character of Kenora compared to other smaller Canadian cities. While I cannot speak with authority on other cities for lack of experience, I began to feel that Kenora is in many ways the quintessential Canadian town, still addressing challenging dichotomies that have coloured this country's history: settler meets Aboriginal populations and industry meets nature. I believe insularity may cement a set of dynamics, for better or for worse.

In the same vein, a rather distinct feature of Kenora (compared to many other Canadian cities and towns) is its nearly cheek by jowl situation between Obashkaandagaang, Ochiichagwe'babigo'ining and Wauzhushk Onigum, so I began to wonder how this is now influencing relationships, given a formal commitment to improvement under CLCG. One participant mentioned that because Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals do interact daily, and because Northwestern Ontario is supposedly "the heart of tradition", non-Aboriginals are tuning in to Aboriginal cultural practices with increasing interest (Participant #6/122011). However, this positive outlook was countered a few times in conversation with other participants, leading me to venture that Kenora may be behind the trend in constructively overcoming these issues.

One respondent went as far as to comment:

*Kenora is a unique place. I think Kenora isn't necessarily representative of the rest of Canada, because in some ways, Kenora is the harshest. I've got to tell you, in some ways, Kenora is the most redneck community I've ever been in. And I was born and raised here. And as I've gone out and experienced things in other places, I'd never come up against the level of prejudice and racism that is rampant in this place. Ever (Participant #16/030212).*

Another noted that cultural misunderstanding between groups is still commonplace, and that she too felt racism is alive and well:

*Now...the way I feel about the non-Aboriginal and the Aboriginal part...the way I feel about racism...it angers me on an almost a daily basis. I experience it in such a way now that it doesn't...really...um...make the impact that it could have made maybe five, ten years ago. Now it just makes me sad. It makes me angry and it makes me sad (Participant #5/011612).*

One participant had a very unique take on how the dichotomies I just mentioned have impacted the land and water:

*I think that when the land or the water has been traumatized through industrial processes...through war...then that energy stays in the soil and the water. So, we have a history here of...battles between tribes and battles between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. So,*

*I'm sure heinous atrocities were committed on our soil, and that needs to be cleared out of our soil and out of the water (Participant #13/022212).*

One challenge that seems to be inherent in moving beyond these dynamics is the prevalence of tourists and cottagers and the related attitude that Kenora is a mecca for recreation. This is perhaps one of the most persistent dichotomies that can act as an obstacle to better cross-cultural relationships: recreation/tourism meets intrinsic value/permanence. Participant #16/030212 said:

*Aboriginal people, their traditions, their priorities, their placing of value and importance on these things...exists still today. What does that say about the non-Aboriginal people? The value is sport, recreation. Over here, this is who we are, this is what we do, this is part of life; we're part of the life cycle, we're part of the ecosystem. There's a far greater affinity to the environment with Aboriginal people than there ever is with non-. Again, it's that plastic society – fast food, drive-through, use it in the moment...never think about what your impact is or what that will do to the water.*

At its core, it is a difference in worldview. I observed and heard from Aboriginal women of a more traditional inclination that the environment has inherent worth and should be treated with the utmost respect. Theirs is an approach that believes human beings are embedded in the cycles of physical and spiritual planes, in contrast to Western compartmentalism (nature/city, life/death).

While it would be unfair to make sweeping statements about tourists, the industry is generally geared towards viewing nature as something to be enjoyed in the moment; entrenched gratitude and a sense of respect or responsibility tend not to be prominent features of recreation (e.g. boating, hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, etc.) from a Western perspective. Moreover, this friction can stem from disparate socioeconomic roots because many Aboriginal residents in the Kenora area do not have the financial means to engage in expensive recreational activities.

One participant shared with me her feelings of frustration about the flooding of First Nations communities due to dam construction and the ignorance of tourists about the issue. She related that when she thinks about water in and around Kenora, she is reminded of the struggles Aboriginal people are facing:

*There's a lot of really great things about Kenora and the surrounding area, but when it comes to water...you know, it makes it a really great tourist location and has helped build a stronger economy, but I think – me being a First Nations person – it's hard to see those positive things when these things [flooding affecting traditional ways] are so stark, right in front of my face. And I think most people wouldn't even think twice about it (Participant #15/022512).*

This highlights the tension between seasonal recreation and Aboriginal issues that continues to dog the relationship between First Nations and non-First Nations in and around Kenora.

It is my sense that the cottage industry likely holds an uneasy place somewhere along the continuum between year-round residents and occasional tourists; obviously developed out of an appreciation for nature (although arguably superficial next to an Aboriginal view), but still out of economic reach to many Aboriginals.

### **4.3 BROADER POLITICAL CONTEXT**

While a thorough analysis of current political affairs vis-à-vis the environment is beyond the scope of this work, I think it is important to mention that the backdrop of federal politics cast a long shadow on people's attitudes towards environmental matters during the course of my research. Specifically, many of my interviews were peppered with references to Alberta's oil sands and the proposed Keystone XL and Northern Gateway pipelines, prioritizing the economy over the environment, and general misgivings about the federal government's dogmatic trajectory. An unfortunate footnote to my research occurred when the Harper government

announced the closure of the Experimental Lakes Area in May 2012 (although this may be on the cusp of resuscitation), the crown jewel in the Kenora area's water science research and an internationally acclaimed institution.

Interestingly, I was left with the impression that these changes could unite Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals in the Kenora area to work towards shared goals of environmental preservation, which would certainly be a boon to *Common Land, Common Ground*; regionalism and a steadfast desire to protect the natural treasure that is Lake of the Woods could prevail over differences in cultural worldviews. Indeed, the comments of one non-Aboriginal participant made me think I may not be alone in this opinion:

*I think that we come from very different places, and unfortunately in the non-Aboriginal community it's been a place of greed and...rape of the environment. We come from very different places but we're coming to a place where we're more on the same page and we have more of the same priorities. It doesn't matter how you come at it, but let's all take care of the water (Participant #13/022212).*



**Plate 1: Photo taken in Kenora by Natasha Szach, November 2011**



#### 4.4 KNOWLEDGE, TEACHINGS AND STORIES: WATER

Figure 2, below, captures the key data themes related to women’s knowledge, teachings and stories about water:

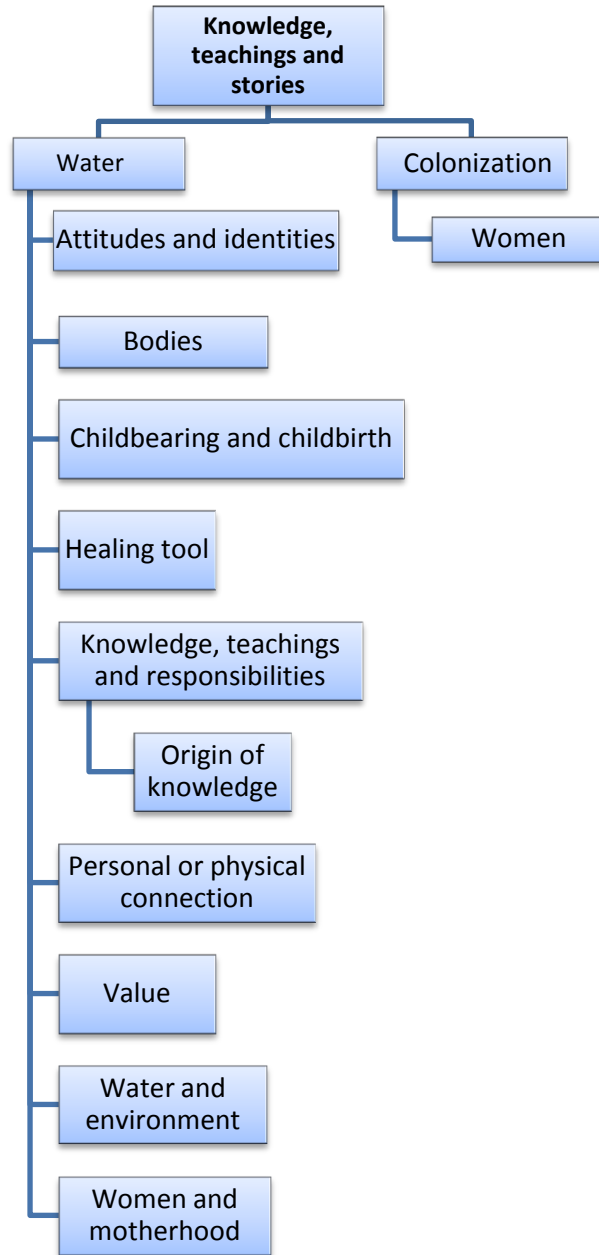


Figure 2: Exploring women’s knowledge, teachings and stories about water

I should note that as I progressed through my data analysis, I realized that using the phrase ‘knowledge, teachings and responsibilities’ (a slight variance from ‘stories’ because ‘responsibilities’ seemed to be more appropriate) as a sub-theme in addition to being a primary theme made sense because they were the true subject of this research.

#### **4.4.1 Attitudes and identities**

Organizing my data for this section produced quite a mixed bag of responses, but several participants made comments that were similar in character.

In terms of attitudes, many women expressed appreciation for the water around their community, but also fear about its quality. These fears were of several origins: pollution/contamination (even that which is occurring in different parts of the world, such as nuclear fallout from Japan), ambivalence over the kind of legacy that will be left for future generations, scarcity of fresh water, and proposed disposal of nuclear waste in the region. During the large group workshop, participants echoed that they felt “scared” about the future of water.

A second common ‘attitude’ theme was the need to be respectful of water and acknowledge that life will cease without it. Others spoke of the pressing need for water to be shared. Language around being “respectful” generally came from a place of traditional knowledge because women voiced that the water is a living being who must be honoured. One participant illuminated the union between life and water by offering:

*...being connected to life is always through the water. And the beauty of it is we don't go anywhere without the life of the water...I'm a jingle-dress dancer as well, which is a story all connected to water as well, whether it's the rain or the ice (Participant #10/021112).*

Water as part of women's identities was experienced in several ways. Some participants remarked that it is part of their identities because they would die without it. Several spoke of the traditional relationship between women and water: childbearing, adherence to cultural teachings, and the responsibility to protect it were deeply ingrained in their perception of who they are. Still others discussed how their personal or family histories translated into a link between water and identity, such as connecting with family to go fishing or just be out on the water, or the fact that their ancestors had traversed and survived from the waters of the Lake of the Woods. Finally, two respondents alluded to the seamless relationship they have with the water and land, one noting that "yes [it is]...so much a part [of my identity] it's difficult to articulate. It encompasses our whole being...mental, physical, spiritual, emotional. All of them" (Participant #21/040312), and the other commenting, "[w]e are the water, we are the land. Because everything that happens to the water will happen to us" (Participant #3/121311).

#### **4.4.2 Bodies**

The overwhelming response I received in terms of the connection between our bodies and Mother Earth was that we are comprised of a large percentage of water, and again, that if this were to be disturbed we would perish. Participant #3/121113, an Anishinaabe woman who was deeply grounded in her culture, extended this sentiment to her whole being:

*...we know we need it for daily survival, not only physical but, you know, to us as Anishinaabe people, we talk about our bodies holistically...our physical being is our spirit; that's the real essence of us... So for us, in relation to water, you really need that...of course you also need the four elements, which [are] water, earth, air and sun – fire. So we really pay respect to that and we really love and honour all of those elements, and we need those four major parts to ourselves as human beings.*

Many women also talked about the physical expressions of water manifested by our bodies: bodily functions, the flow of blood, the womb's response to conception, and crying. One woman, experiencing some health issues, shared this during the group workshop:

*Health-wise, in the last year or so I've had issues with water...being held in my body. Retaining water. And so that's also been an issue and one might look at that negatively, but in some ways...this retention of water has actually brought [to light] other things that might otherwise not have been known to me had that not started happening. Like I say, one might think that was a negative thing, but actually, it helped me. So again, the water aspect to me is important, not just for survival, but...to me, water is life. Water is a live thing just like an animal or a tree or anything else...so water in my body is a living thing in my body. So the way that I look at it is water is trying to tell you something. It's speaking to you in its way (Participant A/011812).*

Another commented specifically on crying:

*One of the gifts we've received in life is the ability to cry...And I'm pretty sure we were the only mammal given that gift. Those tear ducts are very important. They're there for a reason and they're there to empower us. Crying is actually strength. You're releasing that water, you're allowing your body to release and then take in more (Participant #5/011612).*

The same interviewee made what I thought was a simple yet philosophical comment, noting that indeed there is a connection between our bodies and the earth: how we treat our bodies is how we treat the earth.

#### **4.4.3 Childbearing and childbirth**

The connection between childbearing and childbirth and knowledge, teachings and responsibilities in general was extremely strong for most of the Aboriginal women I spoke with, but this section focuses specifically on how childbearing and birthing are tied to water teachings.

Women as “water carriers” can be understood through the experience of pregnancy. Almost all of my participants, regardless of the degree of their traditional knowledge, explained to me that women are water carriers because their bodies “carry” water during pregnancy; the

womb, the first environment for life, is thought to be made of water, protecting and nourishing the unborn baby.

This offers but a glimpse into the profound relationship between water and life in the Aboriginal tradition. A deeper understanding was illuminated by Participant #5/011612 who remarked “your immortality is assured by that water”, because a woman will always be a part of the new life she has created and will continue to live on through subsequent generations. The act of carrying water also informs a teaching about the necessity of caring for oneself during pregnancy because everything ingested by a woman will travel through her fluids to the baby.

Women went on to share the sacredness of their water “breaking” before giving birth, which cleanses a path for the baby to enter the world. Participant #3/121311 also helped me appreciate how this connects women with Mother Earth:

*...they call it ‘when your water breaks’. To us, the way we see that is the same way as when it rains...that’s why it’s natural cleansing. And to us, we say those are the thunderbirds that are coming to cleanse Mother Earth, and you know, replenish the water and all of that. And that’s like when the water breaks, that’s what’s cleansing that path for that child to enter this physical world, so that’s one of our teachings as well.*

Expanding on this, women’s experience of carrying water, childbearing and birth was explained by two participants as a way of celebrating their culture, teachings and traditional ways. They spoke of a mother’s womb as a sweat lodge. I was told that when Aboriginal people enter a human-constructed sweat lodge, it is akin to entering Mother Earth’s womb. When the sweat is complete, the water is the first thing to leave the lodge, parallel to a woman’s water breaking before giving birth. However, Participant #5/011612 cautioned that there is a critical teaching instructing women not to take part in sweats during their pregnancies because of their transformation into becoming their own lodges:

*You are to seek the knowledge, direction and support of an Elder who will guide you throughout your pregnancy process because there are certain things that you don't do. One being, you do not participate in the sweat lodge ceremony, because you're in your own sweat lodge. If you take your hands on your pregnant belly [participant knit hands across stomach] you have ten lodge poles: your fingers are your ten lodge poles. When we go into the sweat lodge, we're returning to Mother Earth – that's what the sweat lodge represents, the womb of Mother Earth. You are carrying something so sacred your body becomes a sweat lodge.*

Interestingly, two participants talked about men's role in the creation of life that also originates from water. They described seminal fluid as the only time a man carries and releases water, making the meeting of water between a woman and a man the beginning of life.

#### **4.4.4 Healing tool**

Data related to water as a healing tool generally fell under two thematic categories: practical, and spiritual or emotional.

Practically, many women described the use of water in medicine taking or making, such as swallowing pills or drinking and bathing in cedar water. Some also saw water as having healing properties for afflictions such as poison ivy, plantar warts, nausea, headaches and wounds. Drinking water to flush out toxins and purify the body was also mentioned several times, and one participant likened this to the earth's systems of waterways acting as filters.

In terms of water's ability to heal spiritual or emotional upsets, many women identified with feeling drawn to water during times of personal crisis. Several expressed feeling that water has a "calming" or "relaxing" effect, even capable of absorbing negative emotions. One participant spoke of water as being a source of physical or spiritual strength during challenging ceremonies:

*And that [water] was what we used to hydrate ourselves throughout the ceremonies. It was like strength to carry on. Because they can be really tough and long...and you're carrying a lot of*

*emotions throughout these sweat lodges. Yeah, water is...from my personal experience, it's very important, traditionally (Participant #15/022512).*

Water as tears was also mentioned again by two participants as a way of expelling emotional pain. One said:

*Water's a healing tool because...our tears contain and release the emotion and the physical stuff that's in our body...when we're grieving, we need to release that loss that we've experienced, and how we do it is by crying. It's a really integral part of our healing. You have to release that. And that's what we need to do for ourselves as we grow into adulthood and different roles and responsibilities and stages of life that we have. We have to release those tears, we have to cry. We have to mourn our losses, because if we don't...we will stay stuck (Participant #5/011612).*

#### **4.4.5 Knowledge, teachings and responsibilities**

Because this portion of my data contained the highest number of references, I have divided the following section, grouping 'knowledge' and 'teachings' together, and 'responsibilities' into a separate subheading for ease of organization.

##### **4.4.5.1 Knowledge and teachings**

*The spiritual teachings are really just about having respect for that water. I think that that's something a lot of us were taught at a young age...if you ever take something from the water, we give tobacco...you give back in some way, or you say a prayer and say, "thank you, Mother Earth, for giving us these fish, and for allowing us to feed from you."*

*There's a plethora of teachings that only a certain group of people are lucky to have...it's like that whole generation of knowledge holders, they're slowly diminishing. And you'd be lucky if you are my age and you had some of those teachings (Participant #15/022512).*

I wanted to begin this section with a quote that helps demonstrate some of the foundational roots much of the language around knowledge and teachings stemmed from throughout the course of interviewing: that most teachings are inextricably linked to respect, and that passing on knowledge and teachings connects us to one another and to the water.

This respect flowed from an appreciation for the bounties of the water, but moreover from the belief that the water gives life, is life/lifeblood, or is a living being (these were generally the three variations articulated by my participants). As was discussed earlier, water's life-giving abilities are not confined to the growth of seeds or plants or the nourishment of humans and animals, but extend to the development of unborn babies in mothers' wombs. This was repeatedly highlighted as profoundly sacred. Participant #11/020912 eloquently stated: "Where we all start from is water. The fundamentals of where life comes from is water. We're born from that. It's women who have that gift of giving life out of that water. No words describe how sacred that is."

One participant affirmed something I learned about Aboriginal culture during my literature review: that water is the lifeblood of Mother Earth. Lakes, rivers and streams act as arteries, veins and capillaries. Another explained that "[water] is not only a living thing, but it has water spirits in it" (Participant #1/113011). Several of my interviewees mentioned spirits living in the water, but Participant #3/121311 spoke of them in a slightly different and more elaborate way than others. She shared:

*I've been told that a long time ago, when water was first here...four beings stepped forward – and I'm told that they were female – and they're the ones who said they would look after the different kinds of water. So one of them said [she] would look after the salt water, and one of them said [she] would look after the fresh water, and one of them said [she] would look after the fog, and one of them said [she] would look after the water our babies grow in. So those are things I really believe in, and that we have to acknowledge [and] ensure that those beings are honoured and thanked for stepping forward to look after those four types of water.*

Irrespective of the depth of appreciation shared with me about water spirits, paying respect to them was talked about at length.



One of the concrete ways respect for water was communicated to me was in the practice of making offerings. Fifteen of my participants spoke specifically about offering tobacco, song, prayer or an article of clothing or food to the water as a way of expressing gratitude, appealing for safety when in water, and honouring those spirits. Participants talked about doing these ceremonies naturally and frequently, but that they had special meaning at certain times of the year. Some told me of parents or grandparents who took them to sacred points along the lake annually to give an offering. Water Day was mentioned as one calendar day that is apt for giving thanks, but an extremely significant time (not marked by the calendar but by seasonal changes) is the spring ice-breakup. Three participants explained that this is a momentous time of year because it is when sleeping water spirits wake and life begins to percolate again; it is a time to honour the life of the water. It is also a time to bless the water so that it may become clean again.



**Plate 2: Photo taken on Tunnel Island during spring thaw by Natasha Szach, February 2012**

A second method of honouring one's relationship to water is through full moon ceremonies. It was explained to me that Grandmother moon, presiding over the waters of the

world, regulates the earth's water cycles. This connection is meaningful because of the union between women and Mother Earth, so menstrual blood ('moon time') is thought of as water flowing from a woman. Some of my participants even spoke of their cycles being in sync with the waxing and waning of the moon. Women take part in full moon ceremonies to celebrate this life-giving ability, release pain, strengthen their relationship with Grandmother moon, and discuss teachings related to being a woman.

As mentioned, the importance of sharing knowledge and teachings seemed to be inherent in the very knowledge and teachings themselves. This is discussed again in the following section (because this tenet is perhaps more appropriately understood as a responsibility), but at this juncture I want to include a few of my participants' thoughts on sharing their knowledge of water.

Some participants spoke of this directly and others indirectly, but many referred to an understanding that we are all interconnected, so what happens to water in one area of the world will inevitably affect others. Group Participant H/011812 explicitly tied her identity as a water keeper to this idea, saying, "...as a water keeper...it's [water] not just an individual issue. It's everyone's issue." Another group participant, coming from a more traditional place, acknowledged the teachings she has received through full moon ceremonies, and described them as gifts to pass on and share with other women. During our one-on-one interview, she noted: "It's known by Anishinaabe women that we need to carry on teachings we teach each other" (Participant #6/122011).

My participants shared exceptionally rich elements of their knowledge and teachings.

Some focused on water as a sentient being, some on Creation and others on their roles as water keepers as captured below:

*Water is alive, just like everything else. And not only does water give life to things, but it has a life of its own. And by adding those things [contaminants], you're taking the life from that water (Participant #16/030212).*

*We have to teach our children, teach our young people that they should respect water... Water is the most precious thing. We have to see if we can get a semblance of what it used to be... [At] the Creation, we had very clean, pristine water...it took a long time to get the water the way it is now. It's going to take a heck of a long time before we can [improve it] ...but we have to start now, for the sake of our children...for the sake of our future (Participant B/011812).*

*Water is used for so many things; it's a mode of transportation to get to trap lines, you're fishing to bring in food...it affects all aspects of that traditional way of life. And that way of life is what we're [Métis women] trying to preserve (Participant #16/030212).*

*So...our spirit, even before it comes here, we've been told it comes through four levels...before that spirit leaves the Creator and comes to this physical world. And one of the levels that it passes is water, [which] we call "everlasting lake". In our language, it's more beautiful, but...it's everlasting lake... And I know that that spirit – whether you're male or female, you get those teachings of that water before you even come here (Participant #3/121311).*

Finally, a critical teaching, anchored in the tradition of Indigenous Knowledge, is that respect and care for water are informed by the balance between women and men:

*And in the Creation story, when the Creator was making things...when life was being thought about and [Creator] was imagining all of the issues that might unfold and all that [we] might experience... [Creator] had to think about what would it be that was going to bring forth that life...and it was that balance between the water and the heat of the sun. The two don't work alone... So, women are given the responsibility for water and men are given the responsibility for fire. And that's right from Creation (Participant #10/021112).*

#### **4.4.5.2 Responsibilities**

Respect for water inspired many of the responsibilities women perceived themselves as having in their role as water keepers. For example, one branch of practice stemming from

respect centred on the responsibility to conserve. Many women discussed being taught by Elders and relatives not to waste water, to take only what was needed, and to share any excess with others. By extension, a more general responsibility is to act as protector of the water from misuse.

Another woman felt it was her duty as a water keeper to refrain from eating anything that came from the water out of respect for the balance of the ecosystem.

As indicated, sharing knowledge and teachings – especially with youth – is embedded in the responsibilities of a water keeper. It is also linked to the idea that women need to act collectively. An Elder who participated in the group discussion stated:

*The role of women...we're all in this together. As I said, it's given by the Creator, this role as women. We're responsible. Now it's up to us...to take full responsibility... You have to really, really work slowly towards getting to where you want. And you have to share with others, of course. You can't just keep it to yourself. And that's exactly what my grandmother had told me as a teenager: "The things we are telling you right now. The things you are seeing right now...it is not for you to keep to yourself. It's not going to do any good. As you learn, as you see things...you have to pass it on. You have to share with others. So they too can learn and pass it on to others and the younger generation" (Participant B/011812).*

I got the impression from several of my participants that being a water keeper is a gift, but that possessing that gift comes with great responsibility. One woman, a carrier of the full moon ceremony, acknowledged that once a responsibility is assumed, it cannot be abandoned.

#### ***4.4.5.3 Origin of knowledge***

Most women attributed their knowledge of water to grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles. Some spoke of ancestors, Elders or influential women in their lives who had also shaped their awareness of cultural teachings. One woman also paid homage to the Creator's role in her learning journey.

Two women talked about knowledge coming from within, one from walking a path of healing that led to making personal choices about how to act as a water keeper, another from life experience: “It’s just the people around me, the environments I’ve been in...it’s self-realizations, my analyses, work life, social life, who I connect with...that all plays a part in my understanding and my connection to water” (Participant #14/022412).

#### **4.4.6 Personal or physical connection**

In outlining their personal or physical connections to water and how these influence women’s lives, several responses were similar in nature to those about attitudes and identity, particularly sentiments on traditional cultural teachings and family histories that were tied to water. I have avoided overlap in this section by focusing on different perspectives that were shared from those discussed in relation to attitudes.

It seemed that most participants immediately drew upon childhood memories to frame their personal relationships with water. They reminisced about the joy they experienced being in or near water as children, and how this contributed to their appreciation of it in the present day. Moreover, many spoke of familial relationships that were nurtured around water through activities such as fishing, swimming, wild rice picking and boating/canoeing. A few women acknowledged that because their parents and grandparents had similar childhood experiences, water acted as a nexus to their ancestry. Being taught as young children to respect the water was also mentioned several times.

A second commonly discussed childhood experience around water was the physical act of hauling it for lack of running water in the house. Nine of my participants had had some experience with this, which unquestionably strengthened their appreciation for water.

Finally, when asked how their relationship with water influences their lives, a few participants talked about sharing the same activities that brought them happiness as children with their children and grandchildren. A few others gravitated more towards feeling that their personal and physical relationship to water influences their desire to advocate for the water in their professional endeavours. Two participants linked water with a sense of history and belonging. Participant #15/022512 reflected on the historical connection she had with water by sharing:

*And...I can't say that I ever really understood why, but we [Anishinaabe people] do feel a really strong connection being close to water. I've always wanted to be next to water...You know, the Lake of the Woods is beautiful, untouched land and you really feel like you want to protect it because there's so much history in that water. I mean, people were born on these islands – my dad was born on a small island where there was just one cabin. And it was their life source. They depended on this water for everything: for transportation, for food, for leisure...it's basically what connects a lot of communities around the area. So, it is a really strong connection to water for us as a people.*

Participant #14/022412 remarked on how the water of the Lake of the Woods is home:

*This lake has a more strong connection because this is where my family's originally from. My mom's from Shoal Lake #39 and my dad's from Big Island. And they're both on Lake of the Woods. So there's my strong connection in that way.*

#### **4.4.7 Value**

As expected, some participants spoke of the value of having so much fresh water around them; two women referred to water as being as precious as gold.

Others derived value from the water in terms of its ability to foster community, speaking about the life and activity that take place at the water's edge.

Again, there was also mention of participants' ancestors relying on the water for survival. One young woman emphasized that "...the Lake of the Woods...holds a lot of history, and it has a lot of spiritual meaning to many people" (Participant #15/022512).

#### **4.4.8 Water and the environment**

When asked about the connection between water and the environment in the context of knowledge, teachings and stories, most participants naturally spoke of water's critical function in the development of all forms of life, highlighting that life on earth would terminate without it. A few women talked about how water allows Mother Earth to flourish and she, in turn, provides the necessities of life to beings. Further to this reciprocal relationship, one participant (#3/121311) said:

*Well to me, everything is interconnected, interrelated. Everything needs each other to survive, to thrive. The earth needs the water to grow food for us, to grow these trees for us for air to breathe...we know that...So for me, I believe everything's interrelated and interconnected and you can't have one without the other. We need all of it – we need those four elements – in order to survive. And as human beings, we've been lucky, we've been very lucky to be given that, and now it's our turn to acknowledge that and to work together to make sure that those...remain there for us: the earth, the water, the air, the fire.*

Another participant remarked on water's ubiquitous nature, exclaiming that water is a minute part of every cell of every living being, but is also formidable enough to carve rock. Another made a beautiful statement about being aware of the water cycle that begins with the gift of rain:

*That's where our water pools and becomes lakes, rivers, streams, rivulets. Every drop of water sustains the next drop. It's a continuous cycle. It's something we're taught in public schools, but it's something that we really need to pause and look at. And be in (Participant #5/011612).*



**Plate 3: Photo taken on Tunnel Island by Natasha, November 2011. This photo shows droplets of water that are part of the hydrologic cycle.**

One participant also expressed a belief that the degradation of water results in volcano eruptions, tsunamis and other major disasters because it is Mother Earth's way of telling us that we need to change our ways.

#### **4.4.9 Women and motherhood**

My focus here pertains to women's non-pregnancy as well as general post-birth experiences of water so as not to reiterate findings outlined under 'childbearing and childbirth' or 'knowledge, teachings and responsibilities'.

Non-pregnancy experiences included giving thanks for the powerful energy associated with moon time or menstruation, bathing, cooking and cleaning, and participation in full moon



ceremonies or the Water Walk (an annual walk organized by Aboriginal women to raise awareness about the plight of water, discussed further in the next chapter).

Some of the women I interviewed who were also mothers talked about their sense of duty to provide clean water for their children. A few came at this with a focus on the practical uses of water, but others were speaking more from an ideological place; again, several said it was their responsibility as mothers and grandmothers to pass on teachings and pray or advocate on behalf of the water for future generations.

Some of the thoughts my participants shared with me that illustrated these non-pregnancy relationships with water and a corresponding sense of responsibility were:

*I think that...grandmotherhood and motherhood is connected to water because we give the water...through breastfeeding. That's important. And that comes from...needing water, and drinking lots of water, and making soups. That's with water. And that's how – that's how you pass your food to your children. And then you teach that to your children when they have their own children (Participant #4/011212).*

*So, with ceremony, praying for the water. Making those offerings to the water. Helping our young women enter their berry fast and...[to] take care of that, because their menses are part of the water flow. And how do you care for yourself each month, you know – we're going to experience it for years...So, all of those teachings. You can learn the songs so you can pass the songs down, and to hear the songs...even make new songs (Participant #10/021112).*

*On a daily basis, I'm responsible to offer my tobacco and to give conscious thought and prayer and meditation to that water. Because I was told that the Anishinaabe woman has the energy and the power to facilitate change in that way. And so I do that. I also follow the phases of the moon, in that I do a full moon ceremony once a month, and then respect that water. I also – in the new moon, before the spring solstice, which is usually in March – I will take tobacco ties and go out onto the ice and do a new moon ceremony. Because at that time – I'm told – the doorway opens and you can speak to the grandmothers of the grandmothers of the grandmothers. That is the time a woman's energy is most powerful. So that's what I do to protect water (Participant #5/011612).*

*And even though we know it's polluted, we know there's still good water and we can reverse that. We can all do something to make it better because we need that water for all of us to*

*survive. You know...we look at our fellow human beings and our children and our grandchildren...and even those who are yet to be born; that's what we look at. I want a good legacy for those kids, those children – I do. And I know in my heart – my belief is that we can do ceremonies to correct that. And yes, I know we can do things scientifically too, but those things can work hand in hand together. I really believe that (Participant #3/121311).*

#### **4.5 COLONIZATION, WOMEN AND WATER**

When I set out on this research endeavour, I planned to tell a story predominately about Aboriginal women's knowledge of water in ways that would relate to the *Common Ground's* activities. But another story, a narrative that regrettably lies beneath water knowledge, emerged over the course of my interviewing. It is the story of how colonization has impacted women's relationship to their water teachings and responsibilities.

I was moved by my participants' willingness to share this sensitive information with me, and so I have taken care to handle this section with the utmost discretion and respect for their experiences.

I found that those who did speak of the damaging legacy of colonialism did not tend to do so in a direct way, but alluded to an erosion of their cultural teachings over generations that has influenced in varying ways their level of connection to, and identity as, water keepers. To most, however, there seemed to be an ardent desire to reclaim that body of knowledge.

Some of the women who took part in this research shared thoughts on what their families lost when relatives went through residential schools. Some spoke of mothers and grandmothers who had buried their water teachings deep within themselves after being forced to sever ties to their Aboriginal heritage. Others spoke of denying their own beliefs as younger women or having family members unsupportive of their decision to seek their culture. A few women

acknowledged that the residential school experience had brutally undermined their desire or ability to carry on storytelling and ceremonial practices through which teachings were traditionally passed from one generation to the next. On the other hand, feelings of confusion arising from finally “being given your Nativeness back” were described by another participant (#2/120311). She expressed a real divide between the Native and the non-Native world that is difficult to overcome, each having roots in the distinct worldviews discussed earlier. She also commented on the challenges of living in “the non-Native world”, a remark that speaks volumes about feeling like an outsider occupying a tenuous space in someone else’s construction of a society. In the context of water, one woman shyly revealed that she felt it was not her place to be critical of government decision-makers, which left me with the sense that some women who do identify as water keepers grapple to define the parameters of that identity.

The pain and loss of identity generated by more than one hundred years of colonization and the residential school system has created an inheritance of intergenerational violence, patriarchy, shame and addiction for many Aboriginal women (LaRoque, 1996; Kubik, Bourassa and Hampton, 2009). Without a solid grounding in cultural knowledge, women can feel displaced; some told me that returning to water teachings is one way of healing. A young woman who touched on the impacts of residential schools on her community felt certain that women could find the power to overcome such problems by embracing their role as water keepers. Another woman shared very personal stories of her own struggles, from a lonely childhood in a dysfunctional home to experiencing violence, alcohol, and drug addiction later in life. She went on to describe a moment when an Aboriginal Elder told her she needed to discover who she was, her place in Creation. That was the beginning of a long journey of rediscovery that paved the way for her profound relationship with water. She explained that the

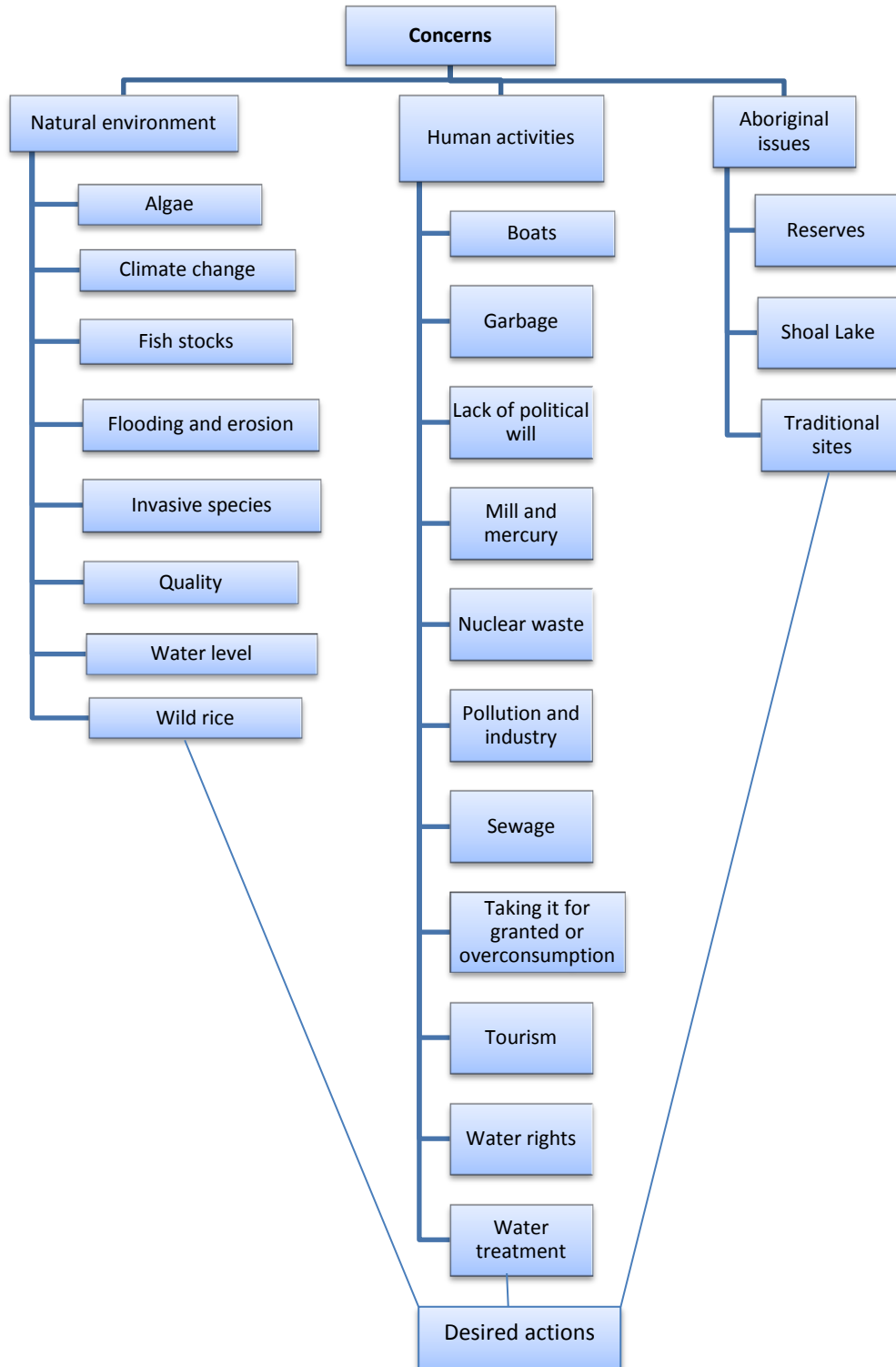
relationship has given her tremendous strength to walk the spiritual path she has chosen. After generously allowing me a peek into her life, she began to speak about how ceremony has liberated her from the effects of colonization: “As women, we carry all that stuff. And this [ceremony] is an opportunity for us to release it. So that’s what I do. I honour our water in that way” (Participant #5/011612).

A few women acknowledged that some Aboriginal communities have internalized racism and this is yet another obstacle to overcome. But as I listened to my participants share their experiences with me, I also heard a hopefulness that the dynamics are beginning to change. One woman conveyed the feeling that Aboriginal women are beginning to reject violence more and more, commenting that the idea of “culture” should never cloak this very serious matter. When asked what it means to be a water keeper, another woman replied,

*So, now we’re a little farther away from the residential schools, we’re a little farther away from that negative background, and we’re a little closer to being in a place where we can be strong with who we are as Anishinaabe in today’s society and say, “I see what you say from [the] mainstream, or wherever you’re coming from. Thank you very much for that information but it’s not ours. Doesn’t really work; it’s not complete enough. Little too linear, little bit of whatever. These are our teachings – thank you for sharing [yours]. And if I share some of our teachings with you, maybe there’ll be a little more fullness in thinking about her [water’s] life (Participant #10/021112)*

## 4.6 CONCERNS

This is the node structure that fulfills objective two: learning about the concerns women have regarding water in and around their communities:



### **Figure 3: Learning about the concerns women have regarding the water in and around their communities**

As the Figure captures, participants had a wide range of concerns that I have organized into three areas.

#### Grouping one: Natural environment

This grouping covers concerns women have about threats to water health. Several of the concerns highlight the broad contributions human activities have made to declining water ecosystem fitness. However, this section is distinguished from the ‘Human activities’ grouping because some of the concerns discussed below can be conceptualized as having a less direct link to human causes.

#### *Algae*

- A few participants voiced concern that sewage and too many effluents/detergents/phosphates were going into the water, causing algal blooms and affecting fish. One participant explained that it was Mother Earth’s way of cleaning herself: “Another thing that I learned about is that sometimes Mother Earth gets tired of being abused...that’s what I was taught. So, she’ll fight back sometimes and things will happen. Like with the algae. And I don’t know if it’s good or bad, but sometimes Mother Earth will clean herself from the bottom of the lake, just trying to get rid of all that stuff that’s in there so she can renew herself” (Participant I/011812).

#### *Climate change*

- Participants commented on changing animal and winter weather patterns. One made the direct link to water, noting concern over lack of precipitation in 2011/2012: “We’re not going to have blueberries next year again. We’re not going to have wild rice again. I already know that. And that’s what’s upsetting me. And nobody seems to realize that it’s because we’re not being aware of the water” (Participant #5/011612).

#### *Fish Stocks*

- Concerns included population decline, overfishing, loss of habitat, disease and dams.

### *Flooding and erosion*

- Flooding came up a few times during the course of my interviews but only one participant spoke of flooding and erosion in the context of concerns. Her concern was that erosion caused by flooding (created by dam construction) releases contaminants such as mercury that are held in the ground and in trees.

### *Invasive species*

- Parasites and zebra mussels were mentioned.

### *Quality*

- Participants who expressed concerns over water quality tended to focus on drinking water (boil water advisories, E. coli, high concentrations of iron), but two women also commented that there are beaches around their communities where swimming is not safe.

### *Water level*

- Four participants talked about noticing the water level of Lake of the Woods dropping over the past few years. Only one attributed it to the Lake of the Woods Water Control Board.

### *Wild rice*

- Dismay over the disappearance of wild rice – due to inconsistent water levels, drought and damage to the ecosystem – was noted: “We used to have wild rice. I don’t know how much wild rice is being grown now. Really, I don’t. Just wondering how much damage we’ve done to the ecology” (Participant #14/022412).  
“Wild rice – we don’t have wild rice...because of the water levels. The water levels haven’t been consistent because they’re controlled by the dam. But we’re also in a drought. We haven’t had enough rain to sustain our wild rice. There used to be wild rice back here. You used to be able to walk out and just start picking. But now it hasn’t grown in about five years” (Participant #5/011612).

### Grouping two: ‘Human activities’

As mentioned, this grouping is distinct from the types of human activities that participants pointed to when discussing the above concerns related to the natural environment. This section pertains more to the consequences to our water that are products of humanity and our industrial society.

### ***Boats***

- Several participants decried the number of motorboats on the Lake of the Woods because of the gasoline and oil that seep into the water. A few made mention that tourists are a huge contributor to this problem. One woman noted that her Elders were deeply worried at the advent of outboard motors, understanding the damage they would cause to the water: “They foresaw what was going to happen because of...machinery, boats. First Nation people depended a lot on getting from one place to the other – well, they used canoes. And I remember being told that they [Elders] were really concerned when the outboard motor came in that that was going to start pollution and damaging the water” (Participant #7/020112).

### ***Garbage***

- Many of my participants were concerned about garbage contaminating water. Some pointed to woefully inadequate landfill sites on reserves: “The one downfall for First Nation communities is they have difficulty with landfill sites. We just didn’t have those facilities...like, there was a garbage dump, and we have garbage pickup...but that’s it. They’re very limited in where they can dispose of their garbage. And what impact does that make on the land and the water? Because it seeps into the lakes...And the landfill sites are always right next to the community. How does that affect the air and the water? It’s disturbing” (Participant #7/020112).

“But we as human beings – in our clumsy way to think that we’re improving things – we often interfere. And we cause more harm than good. An example would be our landfill site, when they keep digging into the water table. When you throw your bag of garbage into the trench and it splashes into the water, into our water table, that water flows downstream and it flows into our water system...So we need to be more effective in how we treat our garbage, our environment, and how we use the land we live on” (Participant #5/011612).

Others pointed to the infuriatingly ignorant action of people disposing of their refuse in the water: “I don’t feel that the plight of water is being recognized in this community. People talk about it, but if you take a walk any given day of the year, you’ll see garbage in the water, you’ll see people throwing garbage in the water. And there’s not a recognition from the powers that be who could make it a priority” (Participant #16/030212).

### ***Lack of political will***

- A few participants levelled criticism that government officials simply are not committed to the health of the water, evidenced by prioritizing capital pursuits over social or



environmental ones. However, one participant expressed feeling a change in priorities was imminent.

### ***Mill and mercury***

- Two participants voiced concerns about mercury because their community has placed a limit on the amount of fish residents can consume, but by and large, the women I spoke with did not have significant concerns about residual mercury from the now defunct mill (although one mentioned pulp remaining at the bottom of the lake).

### ***Nuclear waste***

- Concern over nuclear waste was of two origins: the Fukushima nuclear plant meltdown in Japan transporting debris through water, and the prospect of nuclear waste being buried in Canadian Shield rock in Northwestern Ontario, contaminating water: “Nuclear industry is pushing to have the waste buried here because of the rock. Treaty #3 said no, but municipalities like Red Lake and Ear Falls are entertaining the idea, which I’m very concerned about” (Participant #11/020912).

### ***Pollution and industry***

- Most participants linked pollution directly to industrial development. Grave concerns were raised about the use of water in forestry, drilling and mining projects, and what would become of the end tailings: “There’s talk about economic development; like, everyone’s all excited about the potential gold mines and other minerals...and what makes me worry is that they’re going to be doing all this exploration and digging, but what are they going to do to the water at the end? And when these mining companies leave, what’s it going to leave our children and our grandchildren? And it gets me worried. Yes, economic development is fantastic, but what are going to be the after-effects? What kind of tailings are going to be left behind for us to clean up? The mining companies aren’t going to do it. It’s going to be up to us to clean up the mess they’ve made” (Participant C/011812).

Two general concerns regarding pollution were use of non-biodegradable products and non-descript pollution that creates the need to treat drinking water.

### ***Sewage***

- Proper sewage treatment is obviously tightly related to water quality (under ‘Natural environment’); some participants were concerned that municipal treatment standards did not apply to cottagers and that raw sewage was finding its way into Lake of the Woods: “When you see those big camps, and you see the sewer line going out into the lake...that’s not right. That’s not right...But I think now, people are more into keeping

the lake clean. And I think the government has really stepped on them on no sewer lines going into the lake. Because they had seen feces and all that floating in bays...and here we are fishing and eating the fish. And why do you suppose sometimes they [the lakes] are so full of E. coli? That's where it's all coming from" (Participant #4/011212).

Another spoke of insufficient sewage treatment in her reserve community.

### ***Taking it for granted or overconsumption***

- Participants observed that water is not a given – it is limited in supply, but not always treated that way. Lack of respect was cited a few times as the reason for this attitude: “I think what’s happened is that it’s been taken for granted. There’s a feeling that there’s a limitless amount of water and there’s not. It is very limited. And in terms of a global perspective, we’re probably one of the last places on earth that has large bodies of fresh water. So people really need to think about that, number one in terms of preservation, but also in terms of being aware of other people around the globe having their eye on that water” (Participant #16/030212).

“It’s as simple as when my grandson wants to wash dishes. And he just wants to run the water, run it, run it, run it – you know. And I have to tell him: ‘We can’t do that. We have to respect that water’” (Participant #9/021112).

“Water has not been respected. When we’re given something free and it’s a gift, sometimes we don’t respect the gift we’ve been given” (Participant #10/021112).

### ***Tourism***

- There was some frustration expressed over Kenora catering to tourists, while tourists themselves were seen as sources of environmental degradation: “And do you see that they go and put those cars on the lake – lakefront property – but yet, if there was a drunk to go and pass out on that lakefront property they would go and throw him in jail. But yet you can have those cars that are probably leaking oil and crap...” (Participant #2/120311).

“People that are here year-round...clean up after themselves. From what I’ve seen, anyway. Some are...you take a fish shack off the lake and all you see is the indent of the fish shack...there’s no nothing. But then you get other people that come in that are throwing garbage overboard and beer cans” (Participant #20/040212).

“You have people coming here just for leisure, but they don’t take care of things around here” (Participant #12/021412).

### ***Water rights***

- Several participants shared concerns that the U.S. will appropriate Canada's water or that Canada will begin selling it – some specifically mentioned water from the Lake of the Woods in this regard.

Private companies gaining water rights for profit was also raised. I heard from some participants that their Elders had prophesied that people would be forced to purchase bottled water in the future: “I was told, as far back as I can remember being a youngster, the Elders saying – and this was over 40 years ago – ‘you know, someday we’re going to have to buy water.’ And I couldn’t comprehend. I used to say, ‘buy water? What do you mean, buy water?’ They knew already, back then, that was going to happen” (Participant #7/020112).

### ***Water treatment***

- The chemicals used in water treatment were of concern to some of my participants. A few women also felt the current treatment approach is unsustainable: “I really think about my own children. Wondering what are they going to do next. We’re treating the water now – how is it going to be when they decide to have their own children? What are we going to be leaving?” (Participant #14/022412)

### **Grouping three: Aboriginal issues**

It goes without saying that all of the concerns my participants spoke about are of concern to Aboriginal people. But this short section is specific to Aboriginal community and cultural concerns related to water.

### ***Reserves***

- As noted, concerns such as garbage and sewage treatment influence on-reserve water quality. One participant also exclaimed: “But also, it’s funny...because the state of water on reserves – you know, the boil water advisories – didn’t even cross my mind because that’s the norm for me at this point in my life. And I just realized that...and like, oh my God. That’s so alarming that it’s just something like, ‘oh yeah. There’s a boil water advisory.’”

## *Shoal Lake*

- Concerns about Shoal Lake came from a feeling of injustice. A few participants spoke of living in the community and not having running water or seeing residents denied water because they lived too far off the grid to have it delivered (including elderly people) or were not deemed in high need (e.g. a single person or a couple without young children): “I had to fight for my water... When I lived in Shoal Lake, I had to literally go to my doctor to get that water because I wasn’t a band member. So, I don’t think water should be treated that way; people shouldn’t be mistreated that way. But some people don’t get water unless they beg for it. Like, I had to get a note from my doctor saying that I needed it. And then to top it off, I had to go get it.” (Participant #1/113111).

Others lamented the lack of consultation by the City of Winnipeg before administrating the community’s water: “If you look at Shoal Lake – Shoal Lake #39 is feeding the water system to Winnipeg. My mother is from Shoal Lake #39, and politically, I can see where the First Nation is coming from. It’s not about the money, it’s about consultation. It’s about getting government reacting in a good way. Not reacting, but just coming to the table and talking to First Nations on this kind of issue” (Participant #14/022412).

## *Traditional sites*

- Concern came from feeling that infrastructure and development projects (particularly those that re-route water) will destroy traditional offering sites. The twinning of the TransCanada highway was specifically mentioned.

### **4.6.1 Desired actions**

Responses included:

- Setting aside sections of Lake of the Woods where there would be moratoriums on the use of motorized boats;
- More stringent septic system and landfill checks; and
- Government shifting emphasis from the economy to the environment.

Several participants shared ideas that would more appropriately be described as systemic changes. They are discussed in Chapter Five.

## 4.7 SUMMARY

This chapter sought to link women's considerable personal and spiritual relationships to water with their concerns about its governance. This wealth of unique knowledge, stemming from cultural and female experiences, produces perspectives on water that pair concern for the very life of the water with concern for all living beings and future generations.

Underpinning the knowledge, teachings, responsibilities and concerns that were shared with me was a deep sense of respect and appreciation for water. As the data revealed, this respect was far-reaching in nature; it ran as a thread through various aspects of women's attitudes towards water, how their identities were shaped by water, and particularly through their experiences of childbirth and child-rearing. There was a palpable connection between the life of the water and human life that seemed to punctuate most of my participants' appreciation of water. The importance of sharing water and sharing knowledge of water illustrated this. Water was also expressed as integral to familial relationships – past, present and future.

Water's power to nourish the human spirit, body, and emotions was also very important to the women who shared their ideas with me. This spoke to water's many healing properties.

The above findings are reflected in what it means to be a water keeper; unpacking this role was the main purpose of this research. However, the experience of colonization also emerged at times, colouring some participants' experiences of being water keepers. I sensed great impacts on women's knowledge from colonization, but also an excitement about a cultural renaissance. Identifying as water keepers was a method of healing for some of my participants, and there was an accompanying feeling that this evolution would lead to stronger women and stronger communities.

The concerns about water that women raised in regards to the natural environment, human activities, and Aboriginal issues were rife with intersections. These intersections included overlap between the three groupings, but also intersections between Western science and traditional knowledge. Concerns exposed past challenges, such as the mill, but participants generally had an eye cast towards how future generations will be impacted by today's water problems.

Much of what was shared with me was in line with the literature on Aboriginal water knowledge, particularly sentiments about holism, interconnectedness, the life of the water and the need for a deep sense of respect for the water (e.g. Blackstock, 2001; McGregor and Whitaker, 2001; Chiefs of Ontario Water Declaration, 2008). It is my sense that the relationship between decolonization and the revival of water teachings has not yet been thoroughly explored in the literature, although it does appear in some Indigenous scholarship (e.g. Anderson, 2000). Finally, while many of the concerns voiced can be said to be universal, and thus reflective of the literature (e.g. de Loë et al., 2009), some spoke to the local context.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: PERCEPTIONS OF ‘WATER GOVERNANCE’ AND ‘SHARED LEARNING’**

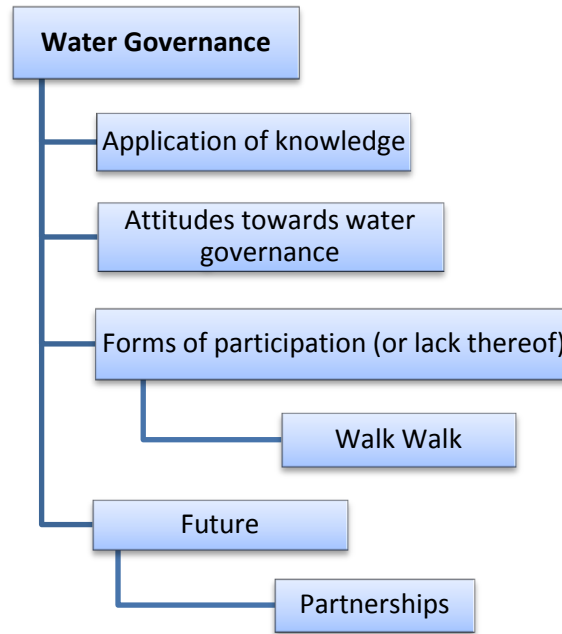
### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter examines the data related to understanding women’s involvement in water governance, and opportunities for women’s knowledge to be shared cross-culturally. Through the course of the research, ‘shared learning’ also came to encompass non-Aboriginal contributions to water governance, and prospects for the two types of knowledge to come together. In analyzing the data, I found that there were many intersections between ideas on water governance and shared learning.

### **5.2 WATER GOVERNANCE**

While a focus on participation in water governance was an essential link to the *Common Ground Research Forum*’s overarching objectives, through the course of interviewing I discovered actual involvement in governance activities was either limited or conceptualized very differently than a Western model of governance might operate, such as understanding one’s role as being grounded in prayer. However, different understandings of water governance did not preclude the desire to create better partnerships between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals for the sake of protecting the water.

Figure 4 captures the main themes grounded in the data related to ‘water governance’:



**Figure 4: Establishing the role women have played and are playing in water governance in their communities, including the waters that flow around *Common Ground***

### 5.2.1 Application of knowledge

This particular portion of data reflects findings related to hard applications of scientific knowledge rather than spiritual approaches (which are discussed below).

I was fortunate enough to speak with a few women who had experience working in water or environmental management and who were willing to share information on those applications with me. Their work included water plant operations in two First Nation communities, fisheries assessments, wild rice studies and mercury netting. Keeping in mind my goals and objectives, I also asked about their thoughts on linking hard science with Indigenous wisdom in the context of their work. I found that while these women were supportive of the inclusion of a more traditional form of knowledge, they seemed to view it as secondary; they held measureable scientific evidence on water and environmental issues in high regard. The women who worked



in the water treatment sector understandably seemed to have a singular focus on the actual treatment of drinking water, tending not to dwell on an holistic interpretation of water health.

### 5.2.2 Attitudes towards water governance

Despite the significant breadth of ideas about water governance that emerged through the course of discussion, an overwhelming majority initially said they had little awareness of any Western-structured governance activities, including government-based decision-making. I was left with the impression that some women had little use for government-based models because they simply exist outside of spiritually-grounded roles and responsibilities. The issue of actually being asked to the decision-making table also came up, with a few participants expressing that current governance schemes consult only out of a constitutional obligation to do so, undermining the potential for authentic participation and partnership: “I think they [proponents of development projects] were forced to talk to us because we’re an Aboriginal organization. Under duty to consult, they have to. I don’t think they’ve come willingly – I think they’re coming there under requirement of the government. They’re not fully listening” (Participant #21/040312). Participant #3/121311 also commented on the role of government:

*To me, I really don’t know...even when they [government] regulate the water...I don’t think they do that properly anyway. ’Cause it affects a lot, but I know it’s just done so – whatever recreation they’re doing. And I don’t think they really think about other....the other parts of the water life, about the land life. I don’t think they take that into consideration. Or even the plant life in the water we have. Stuff like that, they don’t really look at that part.*

When pressed, some women spoke of inadequate water management in their communities (Kenora and otherwise) stemming from broader governance/leadership challenges or preferential treatment of industry. One participant offered:

*[Do I think water has been] managed well? Well, unfortunately, I think water is often managed for hydroelectricity rather than fisheries. Over the years, I know it has negatively affected*

*spawning. I know that a biologist is working to try and regulate the water flow at spawning times to improve it for both Walleye and Lake Sturgeon, I think. So, in a way, I guess technically there are organizations that are meant to protect it [water], but...just like forestry companies like to manage for forestry, some of the water management organizations are managing more for other things than...more inclusive [interests], I guess...Mind you, technically your goals – whether you're Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal – are [the same]: wanting to protect the water (Participant #18/031612).*

The same woman thoughtfully weighed in on what she saw as necessary to move towards better governance, suggesting ending the practice of having one person in a given jurisdiction, community or department with a monopoly on information and no means of networking with others to share it.

In the spirit of an Aboriginal notion of governance, Participant #3/121311 said:

*So for me...I don't know, maybe I'm being pessimistic [laughs] but I always knew that it couldn't be government to change anything for us. It has to be ourselves. And each and every one of us have that, were given the gift and responsibility to do that. Not only for ourselves but for all of us... As Anishinaabe people, you know, we've been given that gift to look after that water spiritually. So we'll continue doing that. Because when you talk about governance...we believe it's inherent in all of us and we received those teachings before we even came here.*

### **5.2.3 Forms of participation (or lack thereof)**

The responses I received regarding ways that my participants had been involved in some form of water governance generally fell under four categories: no participation, participation on a spiritual or traditional knowledge level, participation on a scientific level, and participation on an advocacy level, but naturally there was overlap among these.

It would be fair to say that most women who indicated some level of participation in water governance communicated that it was through ceremony, prayer and offerings. Participant #3/121311 shared:

*In terms of water...I still do my ceremonies, and I've been taught to go make offerings in the fall before it freezes up and in the spring as soon as the ice breaks, you know, just to pray for that water. So I continue doing that, and I'll share that with people. And then in our ceremonies...we not only make our food offering but we also make our water offering. And whether it's women, children, everybody, or by yourself, you can do that. And I've been always told that...your prayer doesn't have to be a certain way, it's what you feel in your heart. And it can be one word, two words, one hour long...however your spirit allows you to speak at that time. That's how we make our prayers to that water. And it's not about doing it a certain way, or this way or that way, but it's doing it.*

Some had travelled on multiple occasions to the United States to stand in solidarity with Native American groups and others from around the world concerned about water. These forums, organized by an enthusiastic congressman from Washington State, were described as opportunities to share cultural practices around water and to play advocacy roles. One participant related this:

*We went to Washington (DC). And then last year, we went to Seattle, Washington. Had our meeting there. There was a band there. They lived by the ocean, these Aboriginal people. Oh God, they had such a beautiful place. It was so nice, you go by the ocean...we offered a lot of tobacco there, to thank the water and be thankful for the water... I met a lot of very influential people who know about all these things, and I learned that there are people fighting for the oceans, and to keep the oceans clean.*

And later, when asked what took place at the meetings, she explained: "Those people from overseas, like England or Austria or India, they bring in what's going on in their country, and we say our piece too. And we just put it all together and the next meeting we see what we come to – what would be the best solution. It's very interesting" (Participant #4/011212).

Another talked about trapping beavers and otters as a way of helping keep the ecosystem in check for the local fishery. While she did not go into detail (and I sensed that was deliberate), I understood there was nuance to her activities; she mentioned trapping for the meaning and purpose of it in the context of water and being respectful of that practice.

Participation on a scientific level generally included any activities that made the connection between what we put into the land and water and the decline of environmental health. Some women felt advocating for better recycling or landfill sites was a form of participation in water governance because of the deleterious effects of waste in the water table. For the women who had had direct employment in environmental management, their participation was specific to the duties of their jobs, such as water treatment or fisheries management plans.

Participation in an advocacy role was related to being a community leader or having been involved in the Lake of the Woods and Rainy River Watershed International Joint Commission (IJC) proceedings. One participant raised the issue that the IJC did not have First Nations consultation built into the process; she had been adamant that nothing less than recognition as rights holders (given treaty rights) would be acceptable. Fortunately, it seemed this was rectified as meetings unfolded. In reference to overcoming this challenge she noted: “I always brought the same message. [And] I discovered that they had similar goals, objectives and visions for water (Participant #11/020912).”

#### ***5.2.3.1 Water Walk***

Initiated by Josephine Mandamin (an Elder from Thunder Bay) in 2003, the Mother Earth Water Walk has evolved to unite women from all four directions of North America in raising awareness across the continent. In 2011, water was collected from Churchill, Manitoba (North), Machias, Maine (East), Gulfport, Mississippi (South) and Aberdeen, Washington (West). Women carried the pails and journeyed on foot to the conclusion point of Madigan Lake, Bad River, Wisconsin where the waters were joined. The walk passed through Kenora in May of that year.

The Water Walk does not just deliver a blanket message about the importance of protecting water, but also attempts to raise awareness about water issues at the points of origin, such as the effects of climate change in the north, the BP oil spill, garbage that is dumped into the Atlantic Ocean from New York City, and the devastation of cod stocks.

Many of my participants had taken part in 2011's Water Walk. They spoke of it being "empowering", an "honour", of feeling "enthusiastic" and keenly aware of the weight of the message regarding water's sacredness and worth. Several shared that there was a palpable spiritual element to the Walk; golden eagles flew overhead and women felt the strength of spirits guiding them. Some were optimistic that the meaning of the Walk was indeed transmitted to the broader community, but I heard that it was an immensely enriching experience even for those who did not necessarily feel this. During the group discussion, one woman explained her experience like this:

*Activism is really important and this is one of the things that's really, really important to me. The ladies came through and a bunch of us got together and organized it. It was so beautiful, the way it happened. It just morphed into what it needed to be, and when this came through, a bunch of us ladies also walked with the Walkers as they made their way from Kenora.*

She went on to elaborate:

*And I'm still astounded by the fact that I was not as sore as I thought I would be, and the energy that came...it was an amazing walk. So when something like that happens, I try to be a part of it. To join, to rally people...and that was the best time. We laughed...there was so much laughter. And I think sometimes there are sacred things, and then there are times for laughter. So we laughed and we sang and we got silly. It was fantastic. That's part of taking on my responsibility as a water keeper (Participant C/011812).*

All of the women who spoke about the Water Walk seemed inspired to act. One participant who did not take part in the 2011 walk but listened to one of the Walkers speak had this to say:

*It is needed. Because you know what's happening. When one of the speakers did her talk on water then, it was so enthusiastic. You get so excited about it and you realize that you have to maybe not let the organizations that we think are doing their job continue to do it the way they are (Participant #18/031612).*

Participant #7/020112 said “To have...the Water Walk...that shows the power of the women, and the reason they're doing it is to advocate for the water...Because it's the woman's role and women's responsibility. We're water carriers. That sends a big message.”

Participant #9/021112 shared:

*Now to me, when I went on the Walk, I went because I was curious. Because as a non-Water Walker, I'd heard about it many times in our lodge, but I'd never really connected to it because I figured 'I'm not on the water line, and I'm not this, and I'm not that'. So, I looked into the work, and this time I participated in it because it went through our territory – the Treaty #3 area. And...when it arrived in Winnipeg at the station...you could physically feel the excitement of knowing that that water ha[d] already travelled this far. And you know, the end was all four directions – waters were going to be poured together in one place. And to be part of that, it was just an honour. An honour. At that time, I had a lot of walking disability, so I couldn't walk very far. But when I did manage to walk with the water, I would continuously remind myself how sacred this water is, how important this water is...I'm carrying a piece of Mother Earth, you know. And to be reverent about it, and to be very careful with it.*

She went on to poignantly comment:

*For somebody who didn't understand, it was just a pail of water. But to me, it represented so much. It represented a whole connection with all four directions. Because we've always – as Anishinaabe people – talked about the four directions and the spirits of the four directions, and what each represents. What nation comes from what direction. Carrying that pail of water...wasn't just water. It was carrying all of our nationalities, all of our people. It was carrying all the plants and the animals that depended on that water. You're carrying something more valuable than...almost life itself. And you see, when I was carrying that water, I [saw] myself in this process and I was really honoured to be there.*

In terms of governance, the overarching message of the Water Walk is that water connects us all and we all have a responsibility to play a role in its governance:

*Governance is not by community alone. Community can give you the highlights about what's going on, but we are only watching what she (earth) is doing. We are observers to her life. She*

*is connected to the oceans, to the rivers, to the lakes, to the waters, to the artesian wells...all of that sort of thing. And so, collectively, governance needs to be...across countries, international, global (Participant #10/021112).*

#### **5.2.4 Future**

Participants offered very different opinions on what future water governance should look like, including the following:

- Having better – and separate – governance approaches for drinking water and water that is used for recreational purposes;
- Appointing an Anishinaabe commissioner to the International Joint Commission;
- Rebuilding and adapting old water-related legislation to make it responsive to modern challenges and reflective of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal concerns;
- Sustained dedication to improving the treaty relationship;
- Greater input by water plant operators into water management;
- Better emergency preparedness plans in the event of water contamination in Aboriginal communities;
- Undertaking an erosion study in the region;
- Sharing water more equitably;
- Enhanced transparency at the decision-making level;
- Educating youth and engaging them in the decision-making process alongside Elders;
- Treating Elders with deference, seeking out their knowledge;
- Far greater Aboriginal input, placed on equal footing with non-Aboriginal approaches;
- More roles for women in the decision-making process, education system or in teaching/learning circles and lodges;
- Genuine commitment to enacting recommendations made by community-led water governance organizations;
- Creation of a culturally sensitive, independent body that could act as a liaison between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities or that would be operational at the community level to improve communication over, and management of, water;
- Opportunities to see water purification processes first-hand or more general community-based workshops on water;
- Increased vigilance on the part of government departments tasked with monitoring dumpsites and sewage lines;
- More historic analyses – sample-based and lived history;
- Valuing of historical knowledge;

- Making use of traditional and social media to raise awareness of water issues;
- Integrating respect for the life of the water into governance schemes; and
- General increased awareness about chemicals used to treat water, the need to conserve water, mitigate pollution, practice less-harmful boating (e.g. replacing filters), and water ecology (e.g. recognizing purple loosestrife and knowing how to respond).

#### **5.2.4.1 Partnerships**

A consistent message in terms of future approaches was the need for partnerships between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals of all ages and levels of influence for effective water management. One or two participants conceptualized this as a meeting of law and policy with ceremony:

*Well, I hope that we can have a joint approach. So, for example, if City Hall decides on any form of governance, they collaborate with First Nations. So, whether they make a new law and then the First Nations people do ritual and ceremony to anchor that law, it's got to be done together. Because we've got to do mainstream and spirit together (Participant #13/022212).*

Others also emphasized the harmonized ways Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal knowledge could come together: "I think we really have to watch our water. It's very important. And I think the Aboriginals and the government should all get together...do whatever they know about water...so it stays healthy, so it stays forever" (Participant #4/011212). Participant #1/113011 commented: "I think that they (Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals) should come together instead of saying, 'no, water is dead', 'no, water is alive'. It should be everyone trying to come together...we're snubbing each other's beliefs [and] we don't treat water the way it's supposed to be treated." One woman was a little more pointed in her attitude:

*I think I'd probably want something that would bring people together...and not just politicians. It would have to be people in this area...who...have a direct connection to the water, in terms of way of life, their culture, their traditions. And non-Aboriginals have that, although when you say it in that way...non-Aboriginals tend to want to separate themselves from the way I just said that. Where, if they were to really, truly look at it, they share the same things. They share the same wants. But because of this 'negativeness' about 'Aboriginal' [ways], they tend to want to*



*separate themselves. So, rather than coming from an Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal place...coming from a 'water' place, connected to that water – coming from that place. And done in such a way that each identifies with (Participant #16/030212).*

Participant #21/040312 was blunt in her assessment of what would legitimize future water governance arrangements in her eyes: “An equal seat at the table. Not just for information purposes...[such as] a token seat.”

I also heard repeatedly that each side has valuable information about the water to contribute, so space needs to be made to share this knowledge. Moreover, more resources need to be made available to ensure Aboriginals are able to fully participate. One participant was cautiously optimistic that the duty to consult was improving participation:

*I know things are getting better; they [Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada] are providing funds to meet with communities under the duty to consult. And I think those funds are needed to arrange meetings, because with the Métis Council, sometimes meetings can't occur if there aren't arrangements because of transportation costs or whatever. So anything related to water, they need to open up the input for more Aboriginal people to participate (Participant #18/031612).*

However, there was an acknowledgement by a few women that it is simply not enough to hope or ask for more meaningful opportunities for participation. Decision-making is underpinned by power and it can be difficult to convince power-holders to relinquish some control. Participant #16/030212 suggested that the entire decision-making process needs to be rethought if a sustained commitment is made to treating Aboriginals as equal partners:

*When it comes to politics, it's a little more difficult, because then you're dealing with the power issues and the control issues that people have. But if you could somehow get through those issues and have people come together and create some kind of group or committee...something that's going to be not quite so formal. Actually go out on the water with the people, in their place and their way of life and tradition...and do that kind of thing. And it would probably be something that would take much longer than a more conservative way of doing it. But to me, you*

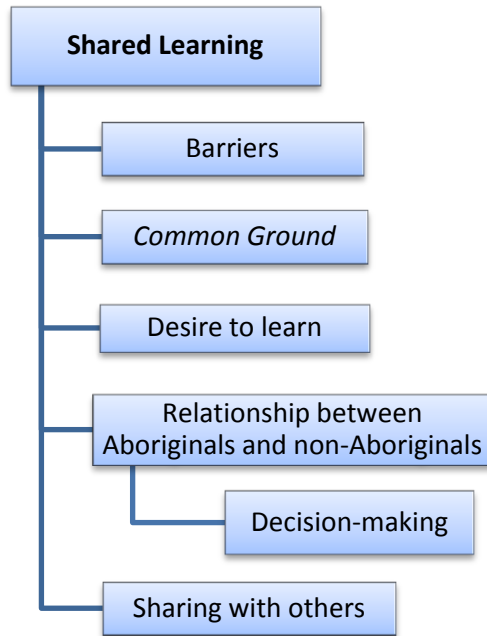
*would be getting at the foundations of...people's beliefs, their values...and doing it in such a way that you're respecting them where they're comfortable...*

Participant #5/011612 felt her community needed to be more proactive and coordinated, forerunners to effective partnerships: “There needs to be a committee struck up and a complete education process in terms of having our community members take full ownership, responsibility, and respect for our land, our environment, and particularly our water.”

### **5.3 SHARED LEARNING**

I felt it was appropriate to conclude this chapter with the ‘Shared Learning’ section because the data offers food for thought that is most relevant to *CLCG*'s activities.

The meaning of shared learning in the context of this research unfolded to refer to three interrelated ideas: opportunities for Aboriginal women to share their knowledge; the different contributions Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals can make to water governance; and opportunities for them to come together to do so. I found that the responses to questions about shared learning exposed both raw attitudes and realities as well as a groundswell of support for the idea of moving beyond historical dynamics and towards shared learning. Figure 5 captures the grounded themes related to shared learning:



**Figure 5: Identifying culturally appropriate opportunities for shared learning about Aboriginal women’s connection to water and their role in its governance**

### 5.3.1 Barriers

This was a difficult section to write because, like discussions around colonization, participants shared complex feelings with me. And while I think it is absolutely imperative to treat those feelings with earnestness, it is also important not to lose hope in the vision of change.

The common theme that ran through many participants’ sentiments on ‘Barriers’ was the difference in worldview and the feelings of racism (coming from both sides) that can develop from unawareness, resulting in barriers to working together and sharing. Participant #5/011612 commented:

*There’s a great deal of misunderstanding between the non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal populations here in Kenora. Lots of racism. And it’s perpetuated by...apathy on both sides. Because you have people that are just plain sick and tired of trying to achieve the same goal using different means. But, you know...they’re tired of trying to build a bridge to nowhere, essentially.*

The same participant also introduced the lack of understanding of the treaty relationship as a barrier:

*The thing that needs to occur is that the non-Aboriginal people in this region need to understand what a treaty is. We are all treaty people. This isn't just something that affects Aboriginal people... Nobody sees or understands that all of us, in this whole region, whether you're in Treaty #3, Treaty #5, Treaty #9, we all have rights under that treaty. And why is it then that only the Aboriginal people are trying to interpret that treaty? Why do we have to fight for that piece of legislation?*



**Plate 4: Photo taken in Kenora by Natasha Szach, November 2011. This billboard seemed to represent some of the frustrations Aboriginal people in the Treaty #3 region feel about treaty relations.**

Another spoke of the disconnect between people who are close to the land and those who make decisions about it, the former experiencing a sense of urgency to protect the water, the latter focused on economic activity. She said:

*I think we (Kenora) could be a mecca of...we could be an ecological entity that could be the role model for the rest of Canada. Because as much as we've got pollution and all that happening here, some things can be reversed, and we have a chance to be a role model for the country. And to me it's a lost opportunity if they're (the government) wanting to go in the old, traditional ways of looking at things.*

Later she added:

*And so the challenge is, how do you raise the priority and consciousness of the people who need to have it? Because those are the people ...in the position of promoting Kenora, promoting the things Kenora is about. And if the message is coming out that way...it creates anger. It creates misunderstandings (Participant #16/0302212).*

Participant #5/011612 also revealed that she felt another barrier to shared learning between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals is an internal struggle playing out in some Aboriginal communities (and individuals) to define what culture means in the present day context. She explained that this is intertwined with healing and alluded to these being precursors to better relations.

Finally, three participants expressed reticence about sharing aspects of their cultural knowledge with non-Aboriginals for fear they might be exploited.

### **5.3.2 Common Ground**

*Common Ground*, the impetus for the work of the *Common Ground Research Forum* and this project, provides a framework for trying to move forward. I tried to get at ‘if’ and ‘how’ *Common Ground* has acted as a catalyst for improving learning and governance activities between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals, particularly related to water.

Several participants reflected on both the concept of *Common Ground* and *Common Ground* as an entity. The general feeling was that while the initial spirit and intent behind the partnership was celebrated by Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals alike, the execution has left everyone wanting more. One participant stated:

*I think with Common Ground...probably at the beginning it was a good thing. It sounded like it was a really powerful...understanding. And now it just kind of floated...and it floated for some time where nobody grasped that...it doesn't have meat and bones anymore. It just kind of fizzled, and it's floating now. I would really like to see something being spoken on water, just to*

*find out what the outcomes are. Because I'm sure it's all going to be very separate. But at least the people that would be interested in it could come together and talk about it, and come up with a good plan on how to work on it (Participant #14/022412).*

When asked whether she thought the relationship between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals has changed since the start of *Common Ground*, Participant #16/030212 replied:

*I'd like to say it has...I think that what it's done is it's created a venue. An opportunity for discussion. I think there's been a lot of misunderstanding about what Common Ground is. I think there's some hostility because of the lack of progress of the whole initiative/corporation thing. Do I think it's a missed opportunity? Sometimes. Sometimes not. We've opened up discussions, people are talking...so I almost see it as more of a bridge.*

However, she also added: "I think it's kind of created new learning in that way. I think it's very positive...but in terms of the connection – bringing the two together – I don't see it really, yet."

In response to the same issue, a third participant paused and then acknowledged activity has petered off:

*It's [the relationship between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals] changed but there needs to be more communication. We were on a roll but things have fallen off the rails. We need to reconnect, maybe through ceremonies and gatherings. We need to maintain and foster that connection because it isn't as strong as it used to be. Other priorities have come up (Participant #11/020912).*

One participant took the conversation in a different direction than other interviewees:

*Well, for us it was one of the great waterways...before Canada was Canada there was the fur trade and there was the voyageurs, and that was the main waterway to and from the Red River in Winnipeg. So that's the water system – we had to go through all those channels and bays to get to Manitoba. We had encampments...we were harvesting and staying all along there because that's the mouth, coming into the city here. So, we would have had our ancestors using that space and I think because we have historical ties we should have been, from the onset, involved in the planning and talks regarding that piece of land.*

She added:

*...it's [Common Ground] always going to focus on First Nations and the city – the Métis always tend to get left out. And we are one of the Aboriginal Peoples. But it gets forgotten (Participant #21/040312).*

But not all of my participants shared a sense of ambivalence about *Common Ground*.

Two women were optimistic, one exclaiming: “I think it’s (the relationship) improved because it’s (*Common Ground*) increased awareness. I like it because it gets out in the news...well, when it does get out, they mention trying to work together more. And from an idealistic perspective...the goal is awesome” (Participant #18/031612). Another participant perceived a decrease in the degree of resistance and division between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Kenora. When I asked her whether she thought *Common Ground* was playing a pivotal role in that process she replied:

*...I think Common Ground is playing a role at the civic level. And for the individuals who are involved and know about it, it's also playing a very human role. But there's still a lot of non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people who've never heard of Common Ground. So, I see the major thrust being at a civic level, which is really exciting. And then it'll filter down into the grassroots.*

She also went on to discuss the tentative plans for construction of a roundhouse on Tunnel Island (a contentious issue):

*I think when we get the roundhouse out there and people from all over the community start using it for community events...there will be people from all cultures taking part with no barriers between. Already they do feasts with honouring the First Nations tradition and welcoming non-First Nations people, right? So, I think that roundhouse is...it feels like it will be the first physical form of the new reality. The roundhouse in the heart of the greater Kenora area – right where the heart pulses on Tunnel Island (Participant #13/022212).*

Another woman shared this:

*I think [the relationship between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals has changed since Common Ground] because it's opened...it's like we're becoming more aware of the situation...because it's out in the open now. And there's still a lot of work to be done, but, you know, you have to open up that can before you can tackle it. Until you open that can – you don't know what's in that can*

*if you don't open it. You can't see in it. So I think that by opening that up...and the discussions are starting to happen now...people will become more aware, and they'll be advocates. I think. I'm hopeful (Participant #7/020112).*

And Participant #3/121311 said: "I think it has the potential to influence...I'm not really too sure [whether it has yet]. I know that it's brought us together ceremonially, like for the spring and fall [feasts]...but I think there's new potential that can rise out of that working relationship."

### **5.3.3 Desire to learn**

One of the many things I learned from my participants is that prior to sharing knowledge, your heart and mind must first be open to learning. Out of that process, empowerment can be bred. One woman commented: "I hope to learn more in-depth, spiritually [about] our culture, what we should be doing as carriers. Because I know there's a little bit more to it that I'm not aware of, but I think you have to get yourself into that...you know, to be ready to do that" (Participant #14/022412). What Participant #16/030212 shared about a particular conversation with a young woman exposed the fact that this can be difficult process for some younger women. She related an experience of trying to convince a younger Aboriginal woman that cultural practices can be undertaken in more than one way:

*[She finally] said [to me], "You know, you're right. We have to be more accepting of people that are different than us...because isn't that what we're fighting?" [laughs] And I said, "Right. If you look at it this way – white people or patriarchy, white people with Native people – they want us to fight each other. They want us to be focused on that, so there's no accountability on that. So if we come together far more stronger...together, diversified...if we're all the same, you know – I welcome the diversity. I welcome the differences in the traditions. And it's important, I think.*

A few women shared certain aspects about being water keepers that they hoped to learn from trusted mentors. It was clear that Elders have a critical role in this process, so I believe it is appropriate to say that they are essential to shared learning. Participant #16/ 030212 explained:



*You start understanding what other people's roles are, what their traditions are, what their practices are. Especially if you come from a place where you've never been taught, you've never been given any teachings growing up – you've never been given any of those things. So, you're basically out there learning for the first time, where you go find these things out. So, you go to trusted people...but before you go to trusted people, you have to nurture a relationship so you can build that trust.*

Another woman shared her experience of learning about water teachings from an Elder: “She teaches me a lot, without even saying anything. You know, she just guides me. It's almost like she's guiding me and I'm going, ‘I don't know how to do this’...But I know that ceremony that I have is mine, and the way that I do it is the way it's supposed to be done (Participant #1/113011).

Participant #5/011612 looked ahead to the day she may be a valued Elder and remarked: “Yeah, I have a good relationship, or I'm building a good relationship, with water. And maybe when I'm an Elder, I'll be able to impart my experiences of water to other people.”

#### **5.3.4 Relationship between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals**

*We need to get over the power struggle. An Elder told me that there are key times in history when Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals come together to address certain issues, and this could be one of those times. Governments are realizing they need to involve First Nations people in decision-making to achieve success. The Elder said we're right at the cusp of cooperation...walking parallel, walking with each other. We're so close on common issues – both sides need to relinquish power. It's like we move [alongside each other], coming back together and moving apart, but breaks might be shorter in-between times when we come together (Participant #11/020912).*

This quote captures the message that I received from some of my participants: that both Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals have water knowledge and the time is nigh to begin sharing it respectfully.

About one third of the women I interviewed were hopeful that the desire to cooperate and exchange information has begun to take root in Kenora, regardless of their attitudes towards

*Common Ground.* One said:

*In the past it has been confrontational, just like with the lumber and the trees and everything else...the Indigenous people wanted to be stewards of the water, and basically the logging company in Kenora didn't. But I see now that if the First Nations people are coming from a place of 'let's keep the water clean', I think now they have someone listening to them. I really think it's changed. And I think that I'm starting to see where non-First Nations people on committees and Council are going to the First Nations people to ask advice. And where certain milestones in our town have been honoured with First Nations ritual. So I see it working (Participant #13/022212).*

A few attributed this to realization on the part of non-Aboriginals that our supply of water is finite and there is much to be gained by learning from the Aboriginal perspective on water. The duty to consult was again brought up; while the participant who mentioned it in this context felt that knowledge is beginning to be more respectfully shared, the caveat was again that this process is being driven by a legal obligation, not open minds and hearts. On that point, she noted that she could not be sure if knowledge is actually being “respectfully received”. Others supported the idea of Western knowledge and Aboriginal knowledge being complementary and equally necessary for a robust approach to water protection.

The remainder of my participants were not as sanguine about relations between Aboriginals and non- because most were unconvinced that non-Aboriginals are making a genuine effort to learn. Two suggested that only environmentalists have a deeper appreciation for the life of the water, more in line with the Aboriginal view. Again, what it seemed to come back to for several women was the difference in worldview. One participant stated:

*Well, I think there's always going to be tension over it (water) because of the lack of cultural understanding, so you're (non-Aboriginal people) not really paying respect to the...really*

*spiritual side to water. And a lot of (Aboriginal) people will take strong offence to that. And it only fuels the fire that exists for the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people (Participant #15/022512).*

In spite of legitimate reservations, almost all of my participants longed for greater sharing of knowledge. Participant #13/022212, though she acknowledged that opportunities for and commitment to shared learning are limited, credited the *Common Ground Research Forum* for improving relations. She said:

*I think we're learning from the Indigenous people and starting to share governance of the land and water with the First Nations people...and opening our ears to hear their stories. The Common Ground story telling – there were First Nations people talking about, 'my dad, the artist' or 'my dad, the Métis fisherman on the lake.' So, I see it far more as being community. And in being community, rather than them and us, it doesn't mean 'melting pot' at all. We don't all become the same. The cultural roots don't blur and blend. We all get to celebrate whatever it is that is our cultural core, and live in a united community as well.*

And another woman, open in her criticism of attitudes that stymie better relations, concluded: “Let's forget about this...white world, red world thing. It's our world. We all live here, we have to learn to co-exist. We have to learn to do that peacefully (Participant #5/011612).

#### ***5.3.4.1 Decision-making***

Unfortunately, most of my participants did not feel that both Western, scientific knowledge and Aboriginal knowledge are equally valued by decision-makers in regards to water. This may be partly due to the fact that some noted that few Aboriginal people are in the position to make decisions about water; they communicated that (non-Aboriginal) government continues to undervalue traditional knowledge, particularly when the end goal is economic prosperity.

One participant highlighted that bureaucratic government structures do not lend themselves to the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives – a critical impediment to shared learning and sharing with others. Another raised a similar challenge inherent in current practice:

*And it's just a very different approach too, when it comes to agreements and decision-making. We do a lot of things just by exchange of words...you know, you honour each other's words. But to non-Aboriginal people, everything's about paper – there's a process to everything, you've got all these legally binding documents...and a lot of the times you're just signing your life away without really understanding what just happened (Participant #15/022512).*

However, three participants told me they thought decision-makers are beginning to seek out Aboriginal involvement. My youngest participant, in response to being asked if she perceived a move towards asking about traditional ways of knowing and incorporating them into decisions, was tentatively hopeful:

*I think it's been recognized but I don't think people have used [it] yet. But I think it's definitely been told and heard. It's just now getting it into the action part of it, which people are still working on. Which is good (Participant #20/022012).*

### **5.3.5 Sharing with others**

Education was the critical point from which all other responses flowed in relation to shared learning between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals – not just conceptualized as something non-Aboriginals should be receiving, but again, the need to learn and grow together. Some of the actions women envisaged as encouraging shared learning included:

- A film documentary that delves into peoples' (particularly women's) diverse relationships with water within and beyond the region;
- General visual media on the importance of water;
- Conducting workshops on water that would include water teachings at *Common Ground* spring and fall feasts;
- More water-related activities such as the Water Walk that could bring together Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals;
- Community-based awareness-raising activities on International Water Day;
- A column in the local newspaper dedicated to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal spiritual discovery;
- A radio station or program that has its finger on the pulse of the Kenora community, creating a venue for shared cultural learning;

- Tourism marketing that makes a concerted effort to reflect Aboriginal knowledge, stories and culture (to the extent that would be appropriate), through signage, information at the Discovery Centre, tourist attractions, brochures, etc.;
- More opportunities for Elders to share their knowledge;
- Local workshops and/or conferences on water that would bring together not only women of all backgrounds but also government, business, Elders and youth;
- A conference just for women (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) on water;
- Greater emphasis on traditional languages to communicate teachings; and
- Developing resource material (for all ages) that respectfully portrays Aboriginal culture (an example given was the creation of a calendar in both Ojibway and English that depicts moon teachings and practical ways people can conserve water).

Youth education figured prominently in the responses I received. Participant #5/011612 was detailed and creative in her ideas:

*Perhaps [there could be] contests with the children, to draw pictures of how we could protect the water, after we relate to them the teachings of the water. Those things could be done in the Ojibway as a second language class as part of the social studies module. I know a lot of the schools now have Aboriginal studies...well, we need to develop tools that are culturally appropriate, that are telling of...the teaching.*

A few women felt the level of awareness about Aboriginal culture and the residential schools experience cultivated in the school system was lacking, invariably reinforcing stereotypes.

Participant #15/022512 saw an opening for youth education on water to accompany a broader focus on Aboriginal history in Canada:

*I think the biggest thing is putting this type of knowledge [of water] into our education system And even in elementary school. It should be starting as early as elementary school. This is the history of water, and this is what it means to many different people. It should be like that for a number of issues, whether it's water or...the state of Aboriginal people, residential schools...because if you're not educating people right from the get-go, they're just going to continue relying on stereotypes that are taught by their families and the generation before them, and it's just a vicious cycle. So, I think putting it in our actual education system is really important, and you would see a definite change in attitudes.*

A few women also wanted to see more comprehensive environmental education incorporated into the curriculum. There was a firm belief that an era of better relations and stewardship would have the best beginnings in the hands of young people.

There were two final messages I received about shared learning. The first was that teachings should never be forced on anyone, but that sharing when asked is a solemn responsibility:

*...anybody who wants to know, who wants to ask, I'm more than willing to share whatever little I know with them. And it doesn't matter...like I said, it could be my own people, could be other people, because the teaching I believe in – like I said – once a teaching is given to you or passed to you, it's yours but it's also yours to pass on to somebody else so that it's carried forever (Participant #3/121311).*

*I'm still learning. And this is what I'm passing on to you now, because you are going to carry that for the rest of your days. But you do have to share. Because it's not going to do you any good if you're going to keep it. Now, at my age, I believe. And I have to pass on all the messages...maybe that's why I'm still here...The Creator has given me a chance to be still here...because I feel I haven't finished the work. That's one of the things the Elders had told me: "Pass it on. And at the same time, you're going to learn from others" (shared at the group discussion by Participant B/011812).*

The second message was the need the work slowly towards shared goals. What I heard was that taking the time to work together more slowly means reflecting on our relationships with each other and the earth. It means not simply hearing what others have to say, but truly listening. And it means a sustained commitment over a length of time that breeds trust, kinship and respect. To close on a note of optimism, I want to share what Participant #3/121311 left me with:

*To me, you know...I have a firm belief that we have a chance. We have an opportunity to work together – all of us as human beings. And that we can...have an earth, and we can have water, and we can have air, and we can use fire in a good way for all of us to thrive in this environment. And it can be for everybody, not just a select few - everybody on this planet, on this earth. So to me, I believe that door's been opened for us now to walk together...and to share and teach each other what good we all have, and put it all together.*

## 5.4 SUMMARY

This chapter laid out the data related to the kind of involvement women have with water governance. It also explored culturally-appropriate ways to share women's knowledge, how non-Aboriginal knowledge can be a companion to the former, and opportunities for the two to converge.

With respect to water governance, most participants expressed limited involvement in Western governance structures as well as uncertainty about the types of governance activities that are actually occurring. Instead, the practice of their spiritually grounded knowledge and teachings was described as their approach to water governance. One of the impediments to participation was the belief that current management schemes are neither conducive to Aboriginal involvement nor reflective of Aboriginal concerns. This is related to some of the literature produced by McGregor and Whitaker (2001), Phare (2009), and Laidlaw and Passelac-Ross (2010). However, the data reveals a general sense of optimism about the possibility of Western-based and Aboriginal governance practices working in tandem.

Participants had varying ideas about the future of water governance, but common themes were increased engagement, more emphasis on Aboriginal knowledge, stronger partnerships between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals, education, and more responsive government. These concepts are firmly rooted in water governance scholarship, particularly in the work of Rogers and Hall (2003), Connelly (2006), Gearey and Jeffrey (2006), de Loë et al. (2009), and Sims and de Loë (2010).

Shared learning was closely connected to water governance. The predominant culturally appropriate ways identified for women to communicate their knowledge were ceremony and sharing their wisdom and teachings through workshops or conferences. Many spoke of the contribution non-Aboriginal people make, and the discussion seemed to centre on the untapped potential for Western-based science and Indigenous Knowledge to complement each other. Many other ideas were generated on opportunities for sharing with others, such as youth education, the use of media (social and otherwise), culturally sensitive tourism marketing, and gatherings. Barriers to this process included racism and a lack of understanding.

Participants were divided on their feelings towards the relationship between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals in Kenora; some felt relations have improved since the inception of *Common Ground*, while others were cautious about making such a statement. Nevertheless, most desired a genuine commitment to shared learning. The current method of decision-making was viewed by most participants as being exclusionary of Aboriginal knowledge, and thus an obstruction to shared learning.



## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

My goal under the *Common Ground Research Forum*'s umbrella was to explore Anishinaabe and Métis women's knowledge of water and participation in water governance. This evolved from an original suggestion that the *CGRF* undertake a project on women's roles as water keepers to encompass women's concerns and ideas on water governance and shared learning, including thoughts on overcoming obstacles to both. A secondary goal was to discover culturally-appropriate ways to share this knowledge. I approached this research through an advocacy and participatory lens, wanting to act as a conduit for Aboriginal women to convey what they felt was important to share about their water knowledge. My strategy of inquiry was ethnography, which I chose for its inclusion of feminist and critical principles, such as a focus on the broader socioeconomic, racial, gender, and political context within which a community's issues exist.

I set out four objectives before entering the field in October, 2011. The first objective was to record Anishinaabe and Métis women's knowledge, teachings and stories of water. The second was to learn about the concerns women have regarding water in and around their communities. The third was to establish the role women have played and are playing in water governance in their communities, including the waters that flow around *Common Ground*. Finally, the fourth objective was to identify culturally appropriate opportunities for shared learning about Aboriginal women's connection to water and their role in its governance.

This research is the product of several months of immersion in a community and worldviews to which I genuinely feel privileged to have been exposed. During that time, I was able to do 19 individual interviews, one small group discussion, and a separate large group discussion. I also engaged in participant observation as much as possible. In the months

following my departure from Kenora and my participants, I spent a good deal of time reflecting on everything I learned from the women who were gracious enough to share their knowledge with me, and on how the second goal of this research could be realized. This last chapter addresses the conclusions I have drawn from the data I amassed and locates my findings within the relevant literature. It is organized around the objectives outlined above. I also offer recommendations on how best Aboriginal women's contributions can enrich or even guide decision-making around water going into the future.

## **6.1 RECORDING WOMEN'S KNOWLEDGE, TEACHINGS AND STORIES OF WATER**

Despite this objective standing alone, women's knowledge, teachings and stories of water were woven throughout all areas of the data; they were at the very core of this research.

Much of what was shared with me aligned with the literature on Aboriginal women's relationship with water. In particular, most women spoke of the life of the water, and her life-giving abilities (e.g. Blackstock, 2001; McGregor and Whitaker, 2001). The deep connection some Anishinaabe and Métis women have with water through carrying their unborn and the process of giving birth figured prominently in the majority of discussions I had with my participants. The sacredness that I felt characterized this aspect of knowledge, teachings and stories seems to elude my ability to suitably describe it, but many of my participants spoke of it eloquently. Like the scholarship on Indigenous women's relationship to water, my participants also highlighted water's role as a linkage to their ancestry and future generations (e.g. McGregor and Whitaker, 2001). To illustrate this, Participant #10/021112 told me:

*And our teachings, which are so rich, they talk about transference. So our responsibility as women, it has all those things. So that as crazy as our young girls are – they run around and*

*have fun – they know there’s a time when they’ll stand up in that line, take their place in position and offer that song and walk down in that beautiful winding way, all the way down to the river, singing a song to offer to her...because they’re part of that whole teaching.*

Participant #3/121311 said:

*...it also fills my spirit when I see the joy in other people that they have some understanding of why we’re doing that [water ceremonies]. And them wanting to do that as well. And I know, you know, it’ll carry on through the generations – it will. Because, like that water is the blood of Mother Earth, the blood of us too [will] carry everything for us. So, my blood is passed down to my children and my grandchildren, just like through my ancestors. So everything they [knew] is still with me and will be with them too.*

The bulk of the knowledge, teachings and responsibilities my participants discussed were also related to the literature, such as the power and importance of a relationship with Grandmother Moon, and the need to reassert traditional practices such as ceremony to protect water for future generations (e.g. Cook, 1999; Anderson, 2000; Chiefs of Ontario Water Declaration, 2008; McGregor, 2008).

Most women came at the subject of knowledge, teachings and stories from a place of sharing their Indigenous Knowledge. I found that this body of wisdom aligned with the literature on IK, such as the knowledge being timeless, holistic, and derived from observations and shared teachings (Brant-Castellano, 2000; McGregor and Whitaker, 2001; Kattau, 2006; Ryan, 2007; McGregor, 2009). Interestingly, it is my sense that while there seems to be reluctance in academia to describe Aboriginal knowledge as “traditional”, many women situate their ways of knowing in precisely that way. The stigma in academic work seems to come from the implication that traditional means static; this construct did not seem to have relevance in the field. On the contrary, my participants showed me that “traditional” knowledge is alive, dynamic and completely pertinent in modern society. Moreover, most women seemed to be

proud of the movement to resurrect tradition. Many Aboriginal women seem to easily reconcile the notions of tradition and change.

The literature also draws attention to IK of water being embedded in relationships (Houde, 2007). This too was reflected in my findings. Participants repeatedly expressed learning from others and the need to share water teachings, but also the connectedness (through water) of all living beings. This points to a valuable lesson regarding shared learning approaches: fostering respectful relationships must come before shared learning objectives, and an authentic commitment must be made to ensure culturally-relevant opportunities to do so.

I can also conclude from my data that a relationship with water is integral to a relationship with oneself and culture for many women. Embracing the intricately layered knowledge, teachings and stories water keepers hold seemed to be an elemental part of many participants' identities. This also speaks to the discourse that emerged in some of my interviews on the correlation between reclaiming water knowledge and decolonization. A few women described becoming or being water keepers as a healing process. This has been explored in the literature by Mercredi and Turpel (1993), Ross (1996), Cajete (1999), and Anderson (2000). One of my observations on this theme was that most women conveyed acceptance that other women may be at varying stages of healing, or even demonstrate fluctuating levels of commitment to water preservation and the idea of being water keepers. The conclusion that seems appropriate to draw is that there is no hierarchy in terms of the amount of knowledge women carry; my participants seemed to regard all contributions as positive, and all forms of appreciation for water were respected.

Earlier in this thesis I touched on the notion that an advocacy and participatory worldview was appropriate for me not only because I wanted to create an empowering work, but because I also wanted to explore the ties between Western feminism and Aboriginal female empowerment. At the risk of oversimplification, the main conclusion I arrived at is that a strong relationship with water is empowering because it can be by turns liberating, political, culturally reaffirming, about choice and decision-making, and defining what womanhood means. Among these concepts intersections exist, and I think that these ideas have currency with all forms of female emancipation. But I also believe non-Aboriginal society harbours many misunderstandings about Aboriginal culture, and about the relationship between Aboriginal women and men. On this point, I would like to offer what Participant #7/020112 told me in response to my question about whether she thought non-Aboriginal people were paying attention to Aboriginal women's knowledge of water:

*I think they're starting to listen because they're recognizing the different roles...and I think they're starting to recognize this is women's role – the water – because it's women at the forefront of advocating for it. It's their responsibility – my responsibility...And it's good for the society part of it because a lot of people in society think that...there's a lot of discrimination between male and females roles. They wonder why only males do certain things...in the First Nation community. There are things that men do that women aren't supposed to do; there are things that women do that men aren't supposed to do. And from an outside perspective...you think that it's very...traditional...and that it's very discriminatory against women. And just those expectations...some people don't realize that that's a role. That there are roles and responsibilities...And those are understood by our people, whereas it wouldn't be understood by mainstream society because that's not how it's done. They think we're unequal...It's a different idea of equality, and, you know, feminism. Feminism plays a part in there.*

What I think this participant was referring to was the balance between women and men in the Anishinaabe way of life and how non-Anishinaabe people often fail to see the parity between women and men. Through an opportunity I had to observe Anishinaabe male and female Elders work together on the topic of water (after the completion of this research), I was able to

somewhat grasp what participants like #7/020112 were referencing. This balance is about men and women walking parallel and supporting each other in their respective roles – water, for women, and fire, for men. It is also about both women and men having an equal voice and decision-making power, and veneration for the knowledge and experience of the other. While these roles can be associated with tasks inside and outside of the home, it would be erroneous to assume that that, by extension, oppresses women. However, I would hesitate to describe the relationship between Anishinaabe or Métis women and men who do subscribe to this idea of equal roles and responsibilities as akin to feminism (and I believe Participant #7 was also reluctant to do so) because it differs in a fundamental way from Western feminism. The Western feminist movement has historically been female-centred – constructed by women, for women. Many men have felt threatened by the idea of female emancipation, and feminism has thus been plagued by resistance, sadly, even among some women. Women have had to battle for rights, and ‘feminist’ issues have often played out in highly charged contexts. My sense is that equality between many Anishinaabe and Métis men and women, on the other hand, is a pursuit striven for by both genders. I would say this conception of the relationship between women and men could most accurately be described as ‘different yet equal’.

Having mentioned above that women’s water knowledge has political dimensions, I think it is appropriate to make a connection between that feature of a relationship with water and my earlier observations on the broader political context within which my research took place. I think that politics at the federal level influenced some of the responses I was given because it was my impression that many Aboriginal women feel at once fearful of the direction the current federal government is taking with respect to the environment, and compelled to act so that we might change our course. The issues I highlighted earlier, such as the development of pipelines and

expansion of the Alberta oil sands, amplify the existing sense of exigency regarding water protection. I will not claim to have insight into exactly how Aboriginal women and their communities understand how they are or should be politically organized, but I believe it is accurate to say that many perceive political strength (on their terms) as necessary to overcome Western-imposed governance and political decisions.

A final revelation that surfaced in discussions of knowledge, teachings and stories was “sense of place”. The topic was expertly covered by another student working on the *Common Ground* project so I will be succinct, but sense of place is a concept that explores a person’s relationship to place through uncovering their physical/geographic and cultural experiences, as well as features of their identity that are connected to a particular space (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977; Sack, 1997; Hay, 1998; Beckley et al., 2007). While difficult to articulate in brief, one of my participants who spoke at length about her relationship to water and memories of growing up around water captured it well:

*I think about all the places that I’ve lived, and they were all beside water. And each body of water that I’ve lived near was very unique in itself. It’s when I come here that I feel I really belong. The other places with bodies of water that I lived at...yeah, I lived there. I enjoyed my time there, but it wasn’t calling me...This is my strong connection here. And I won’t break that bond again (Participant #14/022412).*

At the same time, I think it is likely that for several of my participants, “sense of place” was more in line with the Anishinaabe concept of “place” as being derived from the four elements: an all-encompassing relationship with the water that they are indivisible from (Chiefs of Ontario, 2001).

## 6.2 CONCERNS WOMEN HAVE ABOUT WATER IN AND AROUND THEIR COMMUNITIES

In terms of the concerns participants voiced, some had parallels to concerns canvassed in the literature on water governance (e.g. de Loë et al., 2009). Notably, many women commented on algae, pollution, climate change, sewage, and the “myth of superabundance” (not this term precisely, but rather the perception held by many people that there is no shortage of fresh water). Notably, over-allocation did not come up, but several women commented on hydroelectricity’s impact on water levels.

Kenora’s distinct social context also gives rise to conclusions regarding concerns that are not expressed in the literature. Some of these concerns are unique because they are not necessarily experienced by other regions in Canada in the same way. Specifically, the seasonal tourist culture creates tension over water use, exacerbated by the fact that many tourists come for recreation and do not subscribe to an Aboriginal worldview. One of the conclusions that can be drawn from this is that water governance approaches must be sensitive and responsive to these dynamics.

My findings also reflected a sub-set of concerns that could be described as uniquely Aboriginal, likely to be echoed in other Aboriginal communities and scholarship on Aboriginal water governance. Those included the quality of drinking water on reserves, flooding of traditional lands, and estrangement from water.

I think it is essential to note that if relations between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals in Kenora are to be improved, Aboriginal people must be asked about their concerns regarding water in ways that are relevant to them. I did not get the impression that there are currently many opportunities for them to voice concerns in decision-making fora. On the contrary, I



would occasionally find small advertisements in the local paper, paid for by the municipality or Ministry, that invited public comment into environmental and water works. I am not suggesting that providing input into a project by way of responding to an announcement is irrelevant to Aboriginal people, but the method strikes me as a traditional, top-down management move that views citizens' concerns as an afterthought; the project, whatever it may be, seems to be a foregone conclusion. Based on the data that came out of this research, it is my sense that some Anishinaabe and Métis people would be more engaged if decision-making processes were collaborative and attentive to their concerns.

### **6.3 ESTABLISHING THE ROLE WOMEN HAVE PLAYED AND ARE PLAYING IN WATER GOVERNANCE**

In a similar vein to what I just noted above, few of my participants were actively involved in “mainstream” (Western) water governance activities. Most expressed a lack of awareness of the kinds of water management structures that currently exist. Based on the responses I received, I think it is appropriate to conclude that existing activities are neither inclusive enough nor holistic enough to engross many Aboriginal women. It is also possible that governance mechanisms that are in place are not well-communicated to the public at large. In any event, most women talked about a spiritual understanding of governance and responsibility (such as the Water Walk or offering tobacco and praying), yet communicated that this knowledge could complement other forms of water governance. In that sense, the general literature and my data greatly reflected each other in terms of what ideal governance should look like in Kenora (with the caveat that little has actually been put into practice in the region).

There were numerous examples of this. One prominent theme in both the literature and my interviews was the need to engage a diversity of perspectives (de Loë et al., 2009). My participants advocated for this, highlighting that blending different forms of knowledge can strengthen water protection activities. The idea of people sharing what knowledge they have figured prominently in most discussions. A second theme in the literature which seemed to also be on my participants' minds was the challenge of balancing interests in a governance scheme (Rogers and Hall, 2003; Lemos and Agrawal, 2006; Ostrom, 2007; Ali-Khan and Mulvihill, 2008; Armitage et al., 2009; de Loë, 2009). I would note that the difference in worldview creates a new kind of dynamic to which governance should be reflective.

On this point, my sense from the data collected is that simply attempting to bring Aboriginal players into governance structures that have traditionally marginalized them will not achieve meaningful participation. They must have input into how the structure operates and what it intends to achieve. Within new governance there is an opportunity to ask tough questions about what equitable allocation means and the balance between environmental protection and economic gain. My data shows that an Aboriginal worldview would have much to offer such an assessment. For example, some of my participants touched on the importance of managing the water in a way that ensures equitable access. This notion is connected to Rogers' and Hall's (2003) assertion that governance should stress fair and ethical management.

Another theme in the water governance scholarship reflected in my data was the significance of relationships. Again, the history and social context of Kenora has resulted in additional complexity in terms of relationships, particularly with respect to the treaty relationship. Connelly et al. (2006), Gearey and Jeffrey (2006) and de Loë et al. (2009) contend that relationship-building is one of the keys to legitimate governance. They note that

relationships should be nurtured in ways that engender trust and meaningful dialogue. My participants felt the same, and many alluded to the fraught relationship between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. Participant #3/121311's sentiments highlights one of the main messages presented in this thesis: "It would have to be something where everybody is...representing all people. And even if I was there as an Anishinaabe person, yes, I would be speaking for Anishinaabe people, but for all people too. But I think it would have to be representative of our community here...and they would have to be listened to."

Given some of the thoughts my participants had on water governance, I think it is fair to conclude that they perceive power-sharing to be a problem, but I also suspect jurisdictional issues impede participation.

#### **6.4 IDENTIFYING CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SHARED LEARNING**

Like the process of strengthening relationships, shared learning is essential to successful water governance. And both may be in their infancy. As outlined in the data presented above, several women made comments similar to Participant #14/022412:

*It seems that the way that communities deal with issues – any kind of issues – it's very separate. Everyone has their ideas of what is important to them, and how they are proactive, or how they raise awareness about their community issues. Water, like I said, is taken for granted. And I'm not saying everyone is like that, but I'm saying that if First Nations and the City got together to talk about water, it would be interesting to know what's important. What would be the most important thing for each community, over the use of our water...and how we treat it. I really don't think that discussion is happening at all...One is coming from a very business, economic way of...using water, and then there's the environmental way of 'we've got to be respectful, we've got to treat our water a little bit better than we have been.' There's teachings around our water – we've been here for a long time. You know, each community has their way – and I'm saying from a cultural point – each community has their way of respecting the water. But*

*they're not coming together to talk about our lakes that are in this area. I really don't see that kind of good talk.*

One of the interesting outcomes of my research was that it became evident that there are two types of shared learning occurring in Kenora: one is a process of learning between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, facilitated in part by *Common Ground*; the other is a practice of knowledge sharing between Aboriginal people. Participant #11/020912 touched on both of these:

*We need to bring together women's knowledge, Elders and ceremonies with Western knowledge. That would be a big step in building a common position in water management, even if we just did that for Lake of the Woods. First Nations are beginning to see the importance of coming together under Treaty #3, bringing ceremonies in and including women... We need to bring all those things back. In this territory, we're Anishinaabe and have our own laws, beliefs and practices. It would be good for the healing process to bring all those women, young and old, together.*

A few women made comments similar to Participant #11's last point, telling me that they were beginning to seek out water teachings from trusted Elders. From what I could tell, this is driven by tradition, but also by the need to reclaim knowledge that may have been suppressed by colonial forces. One participant (#16/030212) addressed the fact that many younger women are struggling to find their footing through that process, which I touched on earlier. She commented on the heterogeneity of traditional practices between and within reserve communities and noted that some younger women are initially very opposed to the idea that those practices can be done in more than one way. She attributed that to trying to assert some superiority and power in the only way some young Aboriginal women might be able. I think that the phenomena of shared learning between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals and between Aboriginals are similar to what de Loë et al. (2009) discuss in the literature on shared learning, specifically that the process can

begin to dismantle unequal power arrangements and lead to more holistic systems of knowledge, as established in some of the quotes outlined in the ‘Shared learning’ section of the thesis.

I also believe it is accurate to say that many of the women I spoke with feel that advocating for the water together and in a coordinated way is their best bet for effecting change. Pahl-Wostl et al. (2007) offer thoughts on shared learning that I think encompasses this. They note that shared meanings develop through communication, creating a platform for joint action.

The idea that social relations and resources management issues cannot be separated also surfaced in my data. A reasonable conclusion is that this is even more pronounced in a social context such as Kenora’s, particularly when considering the friction between worldviews. This notion of the importance of social relations corresponds well with the findings of Pahl-Wostl et al. (2007). Women also repeatedly emphasized the need for any kind of governance or shared learning to stress the spiritual aspects of water, which may be met with some opposition by non-Aboriginal decision-makers. In fact, sharing traditional water knowledge was the most consistent message in terms of culturally-appropriate opportunities for sharing knowledge. Women seemed to be open to the type of venue that would invite them to do so, but I heard loudly and clearly from most that their contribution to shared learning on water should be via the knowledge they carry as water keepers.

*Common Ground* could play a critical role in cross-cultural learning in the community. Participants acknowledged that *Common Ground* sparked a “new learning”, but without momentum, that has stalled. Fortunately, the promise of the partnership seems not to have faded; several participants expressed commitment to the vision and hope for the future. Some of the

recommendations below are on water governance generally, and others are specific to *Common Ground* and applicable to the wider community.

## **6.5 WATER GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS AND OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS**

Some of my data on water governance could be useful for the broader academic discussion on the philosophical shift from government to governance. Primarily, my results lend themselves to a contextualized consideration of what should be emphasized in new governance structures that involve Indigenous people, who should be involved, and how to create a governance scheme that is respectful of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal knowledge systems. I turn now to each of these ideas.

The most obvious issue that came up in my data that is critical to new governance involving Aboriginal people is spirituality, which I believe can also be understood as inherent laws or governance. From my limited perspective, spirituality and inherent governance responsibilities for the water cannot be divorced from each other, and inherent responsibilities are not something to be taken lightly. However, Simpson (2001) notes that Indigenous ecological knowledge is often treated as more valuable than spiritual knowledge by mainstream society. The idea that these concepts are two sides of the same coin may present an intellectual obstacle for non-Aboriginal governance actors. They may struggle to understand that practices such as ceremony are not only a form of cultural expression, but also a spiritual expression of responsibility and care for the water that are components of one's identity. New governance approaches must endeavour to learn about how Anishinaabe and Métis practices around water inform knowledge systems about water governance, and when and why certain practices or

protocols are used. The ‘Anishinaabe Perspectives’ lunch and learn sessions put on by the Kenora Area Health Access Centre are an example of a community-led learning process. This kind of event – applied to a new governance system, presented at local environmental stewardship meetings, or even taken into the school system – could begin planting the seeds for a more thorough understanding of water.

Another idea that should be emphasized in new governance involving Aboriginal people is that the design of the structure itself must be carefully considered. Moving away from Western-imposed structures might involve making more time to simply sit and talk about water, tell stories and share teachings, and to make decisions by consensus. Voting or creating a series of regulations may not be appropriate, as they do not necessarily constitute power-sharing. Also, McGregor (2012) contends that governance planning should take a long-term approach. Anishinaabe decision-making about water and the environment often considers the needs of the next seven generations to come.

The notion of scale is always important in new governance, and should be determined by the actors involved. The Kenora area is in a unique situation because it is part of an international water governance body (the IJC), and is home to local community associations focused on environmental stewardship. The Ontario government also put into place Source Water Protection Committees (mentioned earlier), a type of devolution to local authorities, although there does not seem to be a committee in the Kenora region (Ontario Ministry of the Environment, 2013). While the scale of the latter scheme may be most relevant to a community, what it appears to be lacking is a real commitment to involving Aboriginal people, treaty rights, governance or decision-making structures and process, and recognition of the responsibilities some Aboriginal people feel they hold with respect to the water (McGregor, 2012). While I was

in Kenora, I attended an open-house on the most recent Forest Management Plan for the region put on by the Ontario government. The representatives had prepared a series of maps and corresponding information on the plan, wildlife, impact on local communities, etc. and were there to answer residents' questions. I want to emphasize that new governance is *not* government, but this could be an approach adopted by the Source Water Protection Committees (if it has not already been). As an approach, it is more transparent and could act as an initial step towards a more truly collaborative governance structure. McGregor (2012) also notes that the Anishinabek Nation created a Women's Water Commission in 2007, which provides input to the Ontario government on Great Lakes water issues. If satellite groups could be established and the focus broadened to include other water bodies in Ontario – bringing the scale down to the local level – more Anishinaabe and Métis women in and around Kenora may be able to become involved in water governance.

In terms of who should be involved in new governance activities, I am clearly advocating for more roles for Anishinaabe and Métis women (also discussed below). But there are other, less obvious, considerations that should be taken into account. The first is that burgeoning governance systems should not assume that a community's Chief and Council always speak for its residents. My experience was that some women had reservations about their local governments, and carried on governance activities without leadership involvement or support. I recognize that this is a thorny issue, and creates challenges to putting into place a system that respects Aboriginal leaders' authority *and* some women's desire to be involved in water governance in ways that are true to their beliefs. I do not have an answer on how to handle such a delicate situation, but perhaps a more concerted effort from governance actors to reach out to women who follow more traditional water practices may be a way of including them without



upsetting community dynamics. A second consideration is the need for new governance to expand the notion of traditional ecological knowledge and who holds it. Matsui (2012) points out that non-Indigenous local residents can also possess knowledge that has been acquired over time through observation and experience. Because Kenora is home to associations such as the Lake of the Woods Water Sustainability Foundation, there may be an opening for both types of knowledge to come together, inspired by a shared love for the water.

I believe it is accurate to say that many Anishinaabe and Métis women are already doing water governance through teachings, ceremonies, and practices. These could be informative to new governance; right now, they are often overlooked or invisible to government-run water management structures. This highlights the difficulty (if not impossibility) of subsuming this kind of Aboriginal knowledge into legislative arrangements, conjuring up the proverbial round hole/square peg image. It is why the literature on governance promotes a move away from top-down management. So, I think the question should not be ‘how to incorporate’ but ‘how can we do things differently with water governance so that these kinds of activities are respected as equal and meaningful contributions?’ I have tried to give thought to how this could happen in the above sections, but I also want to suggest that this can only occur if the framework for governance is decolonizing. This framework could have any number of features. For example, Matsui (2012, p. 9) stresses the idea of being aware of “...the culturally-biased process of scientific knowledge making, as well as policymaking.” Without a recognition by governance actors that hard science activities are not necessarily better, some Aboriginal actors may reject the approach. This requires sustained critical reflection, which should be built into the process. Maguire (1987, p. 11) was alive to this in her work, which is instructive. She attempted to undo the idea of a neutral research paradigm in academic work, which is equally applicable to the

design of new governance. She wrote: “The power of a paradigm is that it shapes, in nearly unconscious and thus unquestioned ways, perceptions and practices within disciplines. It shapes what we look at, how we look at things, what we label as problems, what problems we consider worth investigating and solving, and what methods are preferred for investigation and action. Likewise, a paradigm influences what we choose not to attend to [and] what we do not see.”

A second potential feature of this framework is that it could seek out Indigenous legal traditions with respect to water. Assuming that water governance from an Aboriginal perspective is automatically couched in treaty rights or Aboriginal rights may not actually reflect what some Anishinaabe and Métis people understand their rights and responsibilities towards water to be. Moreover, despite the fact that a governance arrangement often exists outside of Western laws, it is possible that governance could flourish if linkages could be made between Western and Indigenous legal perspectives.

Besides the above recommendations that are more general regarding water governance, my data and the conclusions I believe emerged from the data lead to a few specific recommendations for planners, local decisions makers, and the *Common Ground Research Forum*.

First, if there is a serious move towards more community-based water governance, which seems to be on the horizon with the budding Water Resources Centre for the Lake of the Woods and Rainy River watershed, official roles for Aboriginal women should be created. Ideally, this would include a role for both younger women and women who may be considered Elders, to foster knowledge revival in the younger generation and shared learning among women. Furthermore, creating a formal opportunity for Aboriginal women to share their knowledge

through an organization such as the Water Resources Centre will lead to increased learning between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. Some participants said that this is already occurring through the IJC, so encouraging this through venues such as the Centre or the Lake of the Woods Water Sustainability Foundation will only strengthen learning that has already taken place. The qualification that I add is that the role should be defined by Anishinaabe and Métis women. This is the only way for their involvement in such projects to be truly decolonizing.

Also with respect to the Water Resources Centre, I would recommend that it take an holistic approach to water whenever possible, rather than compartmentalize drinking water, water for hydro generation, etc. (as examples). Not only would that spark a new and more progressive way of thinking about the water, but it would create space and legitimize governance activities for Aboriginal people who want to see this kind of approach.

Second, I feel that the gentle, unimposing way that many Aboriginal people have of sharing their knowledge creates an imperative for non-Aboriginal society to really reach out and ask to be taught. For example, Participants #3/120311 and #4/011212 both specifically emphasized that women Elders are willing to share their knowledge when asked, but will not foist it upon anyone. This recommendation underscores the previous one, and can be adopted by the community at large when appropriate, such as at a community event or decision-making meeting that would be complemented by Anishinaabe and Métis teachings or ceremony, and particularly by *Common Land, Common Ground*. The broader local concept for building relations and social learning that some Kenora residents are trying to promote is yet another process which could be enhanced if non-Aboriginal people make a sustained effort to respectfully ask questions and listen with humility.

There is yet another related recommendation that coincides with the two I have already outlined. Since *Common Ground* has struggled to progress over the past years, identifying women who are leaders and who are interested in assuming decision-making roles could reinvigorate the partnership. Many women expressed wanting to become more involved in water governance generally and in *Common Ground* particularly, but are unlikely to request roles on their own.

Fourth, the Métis women I spoke with advocated for greater inclusion of Métis perspectives in *Common Ground* activities. Their perceived exclusion does not bode well for cross-cultural collaboration, but using language in communications that distinguishes between Anishinaabe and Métis, as well as creating a role for Métis participation, may go a long way in easing that tension.

Fifth, several women expressed the desire to see Aboriginal water knowledge become part of the school curriculum. I think this is an important recommendation aimed at the school board, and could be as simple as bringing in a speaker. I believe that the local schools have already incorporated Ojibway language classes; this too could go hand-in-hand with learning about water. Several participants told me how crucial language retention is to water knowledge. A few women also identified the tourism marketing as an avenue for increasing discussion about water. Kenora residents should celebrate the fact that the industry has already latched on to the potential for incorporating water knowledge into its programming, evidenced by last summer's (2012) TryLight Theatre "Living History Project" on water stories (TryLight Theatre Company, 2012). Developing opportunities for youth and tourist education on water could be something *Common Land, Common Ground* could get behind.

Finally, making time to include water teachings during *Common Ground's* spring and fall feasts (if this practice is not already in place) may also engage women, spark conversation on alternative perspectives on water governance, and, in so doing, encourage shared learning.

Aboriginal women's connection to water as mothers, caregivers and teachers is multi-layered and the contribution they have to make must be valued. A singular focus on Western science means doing the job with only partial knowledge and is inappropriate and unjust in a community that is home to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Women's vast body of Indigenous wisdom, developed from generations of lived experiences and integration with the natural world, needs the attention it deserves and should shape new governance processes, swiftly and sincerely. In the context of *Common Ground*, this would benefit not only the health of the water but also relations between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. Moreover, because reclamation of a role as a water keeper is equated with empowerment by many Aboriginal women, having the opportunity to participate in water management decisions may positively affect women's lives in both subtle and significant ways. Many women may still choose to walk the more spiritual path as a way of governing the water, and this too should be honoured by creating space to share these practices with non-Aboriginals, when appropriate.

Both governance and shared learning goals face challenges in the eyes of some Aboriginal women as they relate to *Common Ground*. Some of these challenges are interrelated; different conceptualizations of governance can impede the desire for and commitment to mutual learning outcomes. I believe that governance and learning processes *are* taking place for Anishinaabe, Métis and non-Aboriginal groups, but are often happening in silos. *Common Ground* may be both the obstruction in some cases and the map for charting a new course in

others. Indeed, it has an essential role to play in creating avenues for participation and learning, however incrementally it may be evolving as a partnership.

The good news is that many women do view *Common Ground* as creating a culture of better relations, and even those who are unsure of *Common Ground's* efficacy do want a Kenora characterized by partnerships between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. There is hope that, in time and with education, all parties will begin to view governance and learning from a place of mutual interests rather than divergent philosophies.

## Appendix One

### **Information on Modified Workshops** (copies were made available through Women's Place)

Hello,

Thank you for your interest in being a part of my research project. It is called "Keepers of the Water: Exploring Anishinaabe and Métis Women's Knowledge of Water and Participation in Water Governance".

The main way I will collect information for this project is through a modified workshop. This method borrows from some of the traditions of Indigenous sharing circles, but also draws from a non-Indigenous research method called "focus groups", because I am aware that as a non-First Nations woman I am not entitled to conduct sharing circles. I will explain in more detail in person how the two methods are similar yet different, but at this point I would like you to know that I have chosen to do modified workshops rather than traditional focus groups because I know sharing circles emphasize trust and sincerity. I believe they also support the idea that everyone involved is part-owner of the process, which is what I want for this research.

At the modified workshop, we will discuss issues surrounding water as a group, and I have questions I will ask that will guide our discussion.

I would also like to include Anishinaabe symbol-based reflection in our modified workshop discussion. This arts-based research method acknowledges that symbols can carry certain energies and tell stories of their own. If you have an object of personal significance, perhaps a painting, drawing, sculpture, craft, song, teaching, or story that you have created or that expresses your relationship to water, please bring it so we can discuss its importance as a group. I hope that the inclusion of it will further open the lines of communication among us and give us all a chance to experience this research project in another way. I will give you more information about Anishinaabe symbol-based reflection as a research method when we meet.

Meegwetch.

## Appendix Two

### Consent form for modified workshops



UNIVERSITY  
OF MANITOBA

Natural Resources Institute  
Clayton H. Riddell  
Faculty of Environment, Earth, and Resources

303 Sinnott Building  
70 Dysart Road  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

**Research Project:** Keepers of the Water: Exploring Anishinaabe and Métis Women's Knowledge of Water and Participation in Water Governance

Sponsor: Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada

Dear Research Contributor,

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The objective of this research is to explore the knowledge that you as Anishinaabe or Métis woman have about water, and your participation in water governance in and around your communities.

Together we will use modified workshops (focus groups that include features of Aboriginal sharing circles) and Anishinaabe symbol-based reflection to generate discussion on my research topic. The workshop is a one time commitment of approximately three hours, with the possibility of a follow-up interview if you are interested. All the information that you provide me with will be confidential and I will use a pseudonym for you in all of my written material and presentations. Only the local research team will know the participants and you will not be identified in any published work.

In the information I sent out on modified workshops I asked you to bring an item of personal significance connected to water for the Anishinaabe symbol-based reflection component of this research. Just so there is no confusion, the item is just for discussion and you can take it home with you when we are finished for the day.



I would, with your permission, like to record our modified workshop discussion with a personal recording device so I can focus on our conversation rather than taking notes. Once we have completed the workshop, I will transcribe our discussion. It is likely that pieces of our discussion will appear in my published work, but I will not use your name. The transcripts will use false names or numbers to identify participants, which will ensure confidentiality. A file that links participants' names to codes will be kept in a locked office on a password protected computer and will be destroyed two years after the termination of the project. This way you can be assured that the thoughts and ideas you have shared with me will be protected and that you will not be identified unless you wish to be.

I do not anticipate that your participation in this research should expose you to any risks beyond those you experience in the course of your work and daily life. The benefits of participating in this research are that you will be given the opportunity to share your knowledge and connect with others on an issue of importance.

Following our modified workshop, I will go through the transcripts and look for themes. I will check back with you to make sure I am on the right track, and that I am representing your contribution accurately.

You will be given a gift to express my appreciation for your participation.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a contributor. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board(s) and a representative(s) of the University of Manitoba Research Quality Management /Assurance office may also require access to your research records for safety and quality assurance purposes.

This research has been approved by the Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact Maggie Bowman, the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at +1-204-474-7122. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to participate. I understand that the interview will be recorded and that researchers may quote from my written or oral comments, but that my name will not be associated with any of my remarks.

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date

\_\_\_\_\_ Name (printed)

If you have any further questions about this study you may call Natasha Szach, the principle investigator at (204) 223-5288/(807) 465-5282. If you have concerns about the study, you may call Dr. Sinclair, the research supervisor at (204) 474-8374.

If you are interested in receiving a summary of the results of this research, check the box below and be sure to add your full name and address in the space provided. When the project is complete, we will provide a summary and make you aware of published material that will result from this study.

Yes, I am interested in receiving a summary of this research (include contact details below).

Name:

Mailing Address:

Town or city:

Province:

Zip or Postal Code:

Country:

Email (optional):

Thank you,

Natasha Szach and John Sinclair

## Appendix Three

### KEEPERS OF THE WATER: EXPLORING ANISHINAABE AND MÉTIS WOMEN'S KNOWLEDGE OF WATER AND PARTICIPATION IN WATER GOVERNANCE



#### Modified Workshop Guide

Location: Kenora, Ontario  
Field Season: October-March, 2011/2012  
Researcher: Natasha Szach

#### Introduction

Welcome to all of you who have decided to be a part of this modified workshop today, I am sincerely appreciative of your interest in participating. As you know, I am here to learn about the special relationship that you, as women, have with water. I am interested in collecting information on the stories and teachings you possess about water, but only to the degree that you feel comfortable sharing with me. Just so you aware, my research is not directly connected to the activities of *Common Land*, *Common Ground*, and may not have an impact on future plans for the area. I will, however, use the information that you give me and the discussions that we have to write my thesis which will be public and shared with your communities as well as the Common Ground Stewardship Organization and others who might be interested. I consider you to be partners more than participants because I want you to share in the evolution of this project and feel a sense of ownership of the end result.

Hopefully you have all received the information I distributed on how this modified workshop will operate as well as how it differs from a genuine Indigenous sharing circle.

I want this time together to remain as flexible as possible, so I have allowed three hours for the modified workshop. Depending on how everyone is feeling, we can take a break half-way through.

### **Purpose of Meeting**

To begin to uncover why women have a special connection to water, how this knowledge is passed on and held, why it is significant, and how it influences women's participation in water governance in their communities.

### **Gathering**

We will sit in a circle, and I will be both a facilitator and participant. A recording device will also be placed in the middle of the circle, if consent is provided.

I will begin with the following:

- 1) Explaining why I am recording the session and obtaining permission;
- 2) Introducing myself, including my background, a bit about my family, and some personal experiences that are relevant to the research;
- 3) Explaining the idea of the modified workshop, including the Indigenous teachings it incorporates; and
- 4) Explaining the flow of the meeting:
  - a. That we will proceed in a clockwise fashion as Anishinaabe sharing circles are conducted
  - b. That we will go one time around the circle with each topic in mind and then a second time around to respond or add any further comments or ideas

After we have addressed all the topic areas, I will ask if anyone wishes to say anything further. I will also find out at that point if any participants are interested in follow-up semi-structured interviews.

### **Main Topics and Probes**

- 1) Physical connection to water
  - a. How is water important to your everyday life?
  - b. Do you live close to the water?
- 2) Connection between women and water
  - a. Tell me about your relationship as a woman and/or a mother with water

- b. I have been told that because women are the carriers of life we have a responsibility to nurture our bodies, especially when we conceive a child. Can you tell me what this means to you in terms of your connection with water?
  - c. Do you use water to heal? How?
  - d. I have been told that our bodies have a similar composition to Mother Earth (ie: veins are like waterways). What does this mean to you?
- 3) Women as Water Keepers
- a. How has your ancestry or family influenced your connection with water?
  - b. Why are women the keepers of knowledge?
  - c. How did you come to hold that knowledge?
- 4) Concerns about water
- a. What concerns you about water or water management in your community?
  - b. Where do these concerns come from?
- 5) Water governance
- a. What are your unique responsibilities to water, as women?
  - b. What has your role been in water management in your community?
  - c. Should this role be changed? How?
- 6) Shared Learning
- a. How have you shared your teaching about water in the community?
  - b. What are your opportunities to share your knowledge?
  - c. Would you like to see knowledge-sharing between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community members change? How?

## Appendix Four

### Consent form for individual interviews



UNIVERSITY  
OF MANITOBA

Natural Resources Institute  
Clayton H. Riddell Faculty of  
Environment, Earth, and Resources

303 Sinnott Building  
70 Dysart Road  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
Canada R3T 2N2

**Research Project:** Keepers of the Water: Exploring Anishinaabe and Métis Women's Knowledge of Water and Participation in Water Governance

Sponsor: Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada

Dear Research Contributor,

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The objective of this research is to explore the knowledge that you as an Anishinaabe or Metis woman have about water, and your participation in water governance in and around your community.

We will spend some time together and I will conduct a semi-structured interview on your relationship with water. All the information that you provide me with will be confidential and I will use a pseudonym for you in all of my written material and presentations. Only the local research team will know the participants and you will not be identified in any published work.

I would, with your permission, like to record our semi-structured interview discussion with a personal recording device so I can focus on our conversation rather than taking notes. Once we have completed the interview, I will transcribe our discussion. It is likely that pieces of our discussion will appear in my published work, but I will not use your name. The transcripts will use false names or numbers to identify participants, which will ensure confidentiality. A file

that links participants' names to our codes will be kept in a locked office on a password protected computer and will be destroyed two years after the termination of the project. This way you can be assured that the thoughts and ideas you have shared with me will be protected and that you will not be identified unless you wish to be.

I do not anticipate that your participation in this research should expose you to any risks beyond those you experience in the course of your work and daily life. The benefit of participating in this research is the opportunity to share your knowledge with me on an important issue and to help me find appropriate ways to share it with others.

Following our interview, I will go through the transcript and look for themes. I will check back with you to make sure I am on the right track, and that I am representing your contribution accurately.

You will be given a gift to express my appreciation for your participation.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a contributor. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board(s) and a representative(s) of the University of Manitoba Research Quality Management /Assurance office may also require access to your research records for safety and quality assurance purposes.

This research has been approved by the Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact Maggie Bowman, the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at +1-204-474-7122. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to participate. I understand that the interview will be recorded and that researchers may quote from my written or oral comments, but that my name will not be associated with any of my remarks.

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date

\_\_\_\_\_ Name (printed)

If you have any further questions about this study you may call Natasha Szach, the principle investigator at (204) 223-5288. If you have concerns about the study, you may call Dr. Sinclair, the research supervisor at (204) 474-8374.

If you are interested in receiving a summary of the results of this research, check the box below and be sure to add your full name and address in the space provided. When the project is complete, we will provide a summary and make you aware of published material that will result from this study.

Yes, I am interested in receiving a summary of this research (include contact details below).

Name:

Mailing Address:

Town or city:

Province:

Zip or Postal Code:

Country:

Email (optional):

Thank you,

Natasha Szach and John Sinclair



## Appendix Five

### KEEPERS OF THE WATER: EXPLORING ANISHINAABE AND MÉTIS WOMEN'S KNOWLEDGE OF WATER AND PARTICIPATION IN WATER GOVERNANCE



#### Draft Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Location: Kenora, Ontario  
Field Season: October-March, 2011/2012  
Researcher: Natasha Szach

**Main focus of research:** Anishinaabe and Métis women's relationship with water and water governance.

\*Prior to beginning the interview, participants will be asked to sign a consent form, agreeing to be interviewed and their feedback recorded (whether verbatim by a recording device or note-taking), and acknowledging that they are aware of the implications.

#### Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me and contribute to my research. I am here to learn about your relationship, as an Anishinaabe or Métis woman, with water and how you perceive your involvement in water governance in and around your community.

I will be using our discussion today to write my thesis. To be clear, I am not in a position to influence water management/water governance in Kenora or the surrounding communities, but the information you share with me today will be available to the *Common Ground* partners.

Please feel free to ask me any questions you may have, this is a relaxed interview that I would like to think of as a two-way conversation. We can take a break at any point if you would like to.

### **Main Topics**

- 1) Knowledge, teachings, stories about water
- 2) Concerns about water in and around First Nation communities
- 3) Aboriginal women's role in water governance in and around their communities
- 4) Shared learning
- 5) Vision for future water governance
- 6) Questions or comments

### **Proposed Main and Follow-up Questions:**

- 1) What does water mean to you, as a woman?
  - a. As a mother?
  - b. Is it a healing tool?
  - c. Is there a connection between Mother Earth and our bodies that influences your relationship with water?
- 2) Can you tell me about your personal relationship with water?
- 3) Are there certain teachings, knowledge or responsibilities that you hold that are specific to water?
  - a. Where do these teachings/knowledge/responsibilities come from?
- 4) Do you feel your knowledge of water is a part of who you are (ie: identity)?
  - a. Why or why not?
  - b. How?
- 5) Does your knowledge influence your life? Your family? Your work? Your role in your community?
- 6) How is water connected to the rest of the environment?
- 7) What do you think and feel when you think about water in and around your community?
  - a. Has this changed over the course of your life?
- 8) Do you have concerns about water in and around your community?
  - a. Can you tell me what they are and where they come from?
  - b. What would you like to see happen regarding your concerns?
- 9) Have you played a role in water management/water governance in your community?
  - a. If so, can you tell me about it?
  - b. How do you feel about it?

- c. What do you think about water management/water governance in your community?
  - d. What would you like to see in future water management/water governance in and around your community?
- 10) What do you think about the relationship between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals in terms of water?
- 11) What was it like prior to *Common Land, Common Ground*?
- a. Has it since changed? How?
- 12) What do you think about the ways in which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ways of knowing have impacted water management/water governance in and around your community?
- 13) Do you feel knowledge has been respectfully shared between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals in regards to water?
- a. Do you feel both kinds of knowledge have been valued by decision-makers?
- 14) What are your thoughts on future water management/water governance? What does it look like to you?
- 15) Can you tell me how you would like to see your knowledge of water shared with others?

## **Debriefing**

Thank you once again for taking this time to share with me. I have really appreciated having the opportunity to learn from you. My next step will be to go over our interview and pick out some of the major themes that came up through the course of our discussion. I hope to be able to come back to you with these themes to ensure I am on the right track and that I am appropriately representing your thoughts and opinions.

Thank you for being part of this process with me. I look forward to sharing my thesis with you. Please contact me with any questions or additional comments you have.

Meegwetch.

## Appendix Six

### Questions for Environmental Health Officer:

- 1) Can you tell me about your job?
- 2) What are some of the main issues concerning water in Aboriginal communities that you deal with?
- 3) What do you think about water issues on First Nations in the region?
- 4) What is the communication between your office and First Nations like?
  - a. Are there strategies to improve communication?
- 5) Do you think there are differences in water management between Aboriginal communities and the city of Kenora?
- 6) What do you think, in general, about the relationship between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals in the region?
  - a. Has this changed since *Common Land, Common Ground*?
- 7) Are you aware of the role of women in regards to water in Aboriginal culture?
- 8) What do you think about the ways in which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ways of knowing have impacted water management/water governance in the communities you work with?
  - a. Do you feel knowledge has been respectfully shared between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals in regards to water?
  - b. As a decision-maker, do you feel both kinds of knowledge have been valued?
- 9) My project is focused on governance. Is there a desire to move towards a governance model or see a partnership rather than a hierarchy?
- 10) Do you have thoughts on future water management/water governance in the communities you work with?

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