

Mookii Mikinak: Traditional Road to Healing for Indigenous Women Who Experienced Sexual

Exploitation

By

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Abstract

The sexual exploitation of Indigenous women and girls has historical implications from early settler contact in Canada. Indigenous women have been the targets to break down a nation of people and used to build the backbone of Canada through patriarchy policies and laws that continue to oppress and marginalize Indigenous people. They have experienced and continue to experience many forms of abuse, violence, discrimination, and racism because these forms of oppression are deeply rooted in Canada's colonial structures. Indigenous women and girls are disproportionately over-represented in being sexually exploited as a direct result of these colonial ties. Centering traditional Indigenous worldviews, access to ceremony and culturally reflective programming, change can take place, healing can start and for our women to emerge back into the land to find their voice and challenge the systemic barriers that have been in place that kept them voiceless for centuries.

Dedication

In loving memory of my grandmother Lorna Starr, Even though it has been 20 years since you have passed away, I know that you are still by my side guiding me.

(February, 1931-2000)

Acknowledgements

This year could not have been possible without the love and support of my husband Roan Nelson. You told me that you could not give me the world, but what you could do was give me the opportunity to follow my dreams. Your constant faith in me has encouraged me to continuously find my voice, to speak my truth, and allow my heart to lead the way. Thank you for standing beside me and always reminding me that I am capable of anything I put my mind to. “We can make it through anything together, you hold me, and I hold you,”

To my mother, Ricki Burkitt, thank you for always being my biggest cheerleader and for bragging about how wonderful your daughter is to everyone that will listen. Your happiness is my happiness and together we make a more happier times.

To my children Austin, Tayson, Paxton and Tammia, you all have been my motivation to succeed in life. Always believe in yourself, never doubt your ability to create change, and always lead with your heart, it will never steer you wrong. Remember, “I’ll love you forever, I’ll like you for always, as long as I’m living, my babies you’ll be”.

Thank you to my advisor Dr. Mary Kate Dennis. From day one, you gave me a hard time, but it was done out of faith in my ability to rise to the occasion and get my work done. Your style of mentorship (kicking flip flops, pointing out birds, to even cawing like a crow to pull me out of the woods) was unlike anything I have ever experienced. Not everyone carries the gift of mentoring students the way you do, I appreciate that you see in me my love for writing, and even more so my love for our community. Thank you for watering my spirit and nurturing within me my passion to want more, PhD here I come.

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Glossary

Behavioral Health Foundation (BHF)

Canadian Center for Child Protection (CCCP)

Justice Institute of British Columbia (JIBC)

National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking (NAPCHT)

Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC)

Child and Family Services Manual (CFSM)

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG)

Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP)

Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP),

Sexually Exploited Youth Community Coalition (SEYCC)

Stop Sex with Kids (SSK)

The Tri Council Policy Statement (TCPS)

United Nations Glossary on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (UNGSEA)

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Background and Context to this Research

I identify as a Metis woman from Treaty One Territory, home of the Metis nation in Winnipeg, Manitoba. I am a descendant of Peter Fiddler and Mary Mackagonne (Muskegon) from Old York Factory and Norway House located in the northern part of Manitoba. My family is connected to Chief Peguis Reserve; however, our last family member who lived there passed away years ago. Although Peguis is commonly known to be an Ojibwe community, my family line is Swampy Cree. I am an active member in my community and have been guided by Knowledge holder Anna Smith, who had provided me teachings, access to ceremony, and introduced me to the Sundance that has been instrumental in my own healing journey over the past 6 years.

My idea for doing research with Indigenous women who experienced sexual exploitation arose out of my personal experiences as a youth. I am a survivor of childhood sexual abuse and had experiences of being sexually exploited in my adolescence. During that stage in my life, I was surrounded by friends who were heavily entrenched within the sex industry and saw women go missing, or even worse murdered. These experiences I had in my earlier years shaped my perspective and understanding at a young age that sexual exploitation was not the fault of our women but could not articulate why.

As I got older and became more aware, this understanding was further developed when I attended the Inner-City Faculty of Social Work where my passion for creating awareness of this issue also developed into my profession upon graduating in 2010. I began my professional social work practice with the Sexually Exploited Youth Community Coalition (SEYCC) in 2009. The SEYCC opened the door for me to be a part of the solution through advocacy for our women and

youth, and work to change social understanding and institutional responses to sexual exploitation. Shortly after that, in 2010, I worked frontline in the Child Abuse Investigation Unit as the first Youth Exploitation Abuse Investigator Specialist for Child and Family Services. I spent over 6 years working closely with our most vulnerable youth, Winnipeg Police, and multiple collaterals on trying to address this issue. In 2016, I worked at a local Indigenous organization where I supervised the homes for sexually exploited youth that were in the care of Child and Family Services and was responsible for ensuring that Indigenous knowledge was at the forefront of the responsibility for our communities' children.

Everything I have experienced, personally, and professionally lead me to a place to come up with the idea to do research with our women in the community who experienced sexual exploitation. I had a vision that using Indigenous research methods and bringing ceremony into research experience was the only way to capture the hearts of our women. I wanted to know how Indigenous ceremonies could help in the healing process for our women and how we can better meet their needs in social work practice and theory. This thesis has a spirit, I entered into the sweat lodge to sit with my ancestors and Creator to ask for their voices and guidance to bring life into the work that has been done throughout this thesis. Through my dear friend, whom I refer to as my brother, Cory Campbell, and with the help of Creator, the spirits gifted me with the name Mookii Mikinak which is Cree for Emerging Turtle. The colors that represent my thesis and the name, are the colors of the rainbow. Mookii Mikinak represents all of the Indigenous women who have been buried deep into the mud by colonization. The ancestors say Indigenous women are in a state of emerging out of the mud and returning back to the land to reclaim who they are as a people, to find their voices, identity and spirit as Indigenous women. Mookii Mikinack

represents the journey to reclamation, and healing that Mother Earth can provide for Indigenous women and girls who have been victimized through sexual exploitation.

This research journey has been a long road, but I believe that our Indigenous brothers, sisters, and siblings hold the answers and I hoped that this research could capture a glimpse of how we can provide better services by decolonizing social work practice.

Goal of the Thesis

The sexual exploitation of Indigenous women and girls has historical implications from early colonial and settler contact in Canada. Stevenson (2011) maintains that Indigenous women have been the target in a strategy to break down a nation of people. Further, Canada¹ continues to oppress and marginalize Indigenous people through patriarchal laws and policies (Stevenson, 2011). Indigenous women and girls are disproportionately overrepresented in sexual exploitation as a direct result of colonialism. Through centering traditional Indigenous worldviews, access to ceremony and culturally reflective programming, change can take place, healing can start. Our women can emerge back on the land to find their voice and challenge the systemic barriers that have been in place that kept them voiceless for centuries. This topic is personally important because as a social worker I want this research to inform my professional work with sexually exploited women and my goal to create a space that brings women and girls back to the land for healing, their identity, and reclamation of who they are.

¹Canada is used in reference to the federal laws and policies that continue to perpetuate the disenfranchisement of Indigenous people. Canada was created through settler colonialism and does not represent Indigenous communities that have their own laws, governance, and knowledges.

The aim of this research project is fourfold: First, to gain insight into how Indigenous ceremonies and teachings contribute to the healing needs of sexually exploited women. Second, in pursuing this question I hope to gain further understanding of the complexities involved in healing for Indigenous women; Third, I will explore, in discussion with the women participating in this study, whether they think that ceremonies could play a role in preventing the sexual exploitation of Indigenous women and youth. Fourth, my goal is that this research will assist in the development of support and therapeutic programming based on traditional Indigenous ceremonies and teachings

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Historical Implications for Indigenous Women and Girls

Victorian patriarchal ideologies are what built the social structures of Europe and the very fabric of the colonial states in which capitalism is the heartbeat of the industrial drive to seek out more land and property outside of Europe (Stevenson, 2011). Missionaries and fur traders traveling to new lands for exploration and the potential for new settlements, they brought with them patriarchal ideologies that left a devastating trail of destruction amongst the indigenous population with which they encountered (Stevenson, 2011). Canada is no exception to this trail of destruction, in fact when looking at the historical aspects of patriarchal ideologies this perspective shaped federal legislation that was imposed on the Indigenous population through the fur trade (“mercantilism”) to (“Roman Catholic” era) to the present day (Stevenson, 2011, pp. 44).

Before the mercantilism era, Indigenous communities did not have the power imbalances experienced within patriarchal societies. Everyone in the community from elder to infant had roles, purpose, gifts, where their identity is sacred from the moment conception took place within the womb (Personal communication, Ed Azure, 2018). Indigenous women were equal contributors to all aspects of societal living, and they had autonomy over their sexuality, women chose to marry if they wanted, they were leaders, knowledge holders, and viewed as sacred due to being life-givers of the nation (Stevenson, 2011). For thousands of years, ceremony, traditional customs, and natural laws guided the communities. There was no overconsumption of resources, no male domination over women or animals and the balance between nature, ancestors, creator, and the future generations to come was honored and kept sacred (Personal communication, Ed Azure, 2018)

During the mercantilist era, France relied on the Indigenous population for their very survival and the economic gains attained through the fur trade. Stevenson (2011) identified the fur trade as the starting point of the breakdown of traditional Indigenous egalitarian societies. It was done by focusing on capital gain through the commodification of Indigenous labour and extracting resources from the land. During this time fur traders relied on Indigenous women for their knowledge of how to live off the land, hunt, fish, gather foods, along with being translators of their language between both worlds (Stevenson, 2011). The fur traders preferred Indigenous women over European women for the strengths they had and their ability to be self-sustaining, independent, confident and having autonomy over who they were as women (Stevenson, 2011).

As the mercantile era shifted towards the Roman Catholicism era, Europe looked to expand, as they sent missionaries to Canada to prepare the space for settlement and engage with the Indigenous population (Stevenson, 2011). The goal was to prepare the Indigenous population by attempting to create more allies, regulate interracial marriages, provide education for Indigenous women to marry, and to assimilate them without force (Stevenson, 2011). The reality about any colonial settlement is that "Violence, fear, and terror are integral components of settler-colonial societies, helping to establish and secure the ideological and material hierarchies of colonial domination" (Bourgeoisism, 2015, p. 1447). The missionaries came with their patriarchal ideologies of how a woman was to behave and therefore did not expect to come into contact with strong Indigenous women that had equal standing to males. Attempts were made to regulate Indigenous women, but they resisted and were the ones from the very beginning to take a stand and fight for their rights to maintain their roles in the community (Stevenson, 2011). As a result of fighting back, the missionary's waged a war against Indigenous women where various

tactics were used to disenfranchise their very existence with the implementation of the *Indian Act*.

In 1896 the *Indian Act* came into effect, and as a result, Indigenous women continued to be the targets through policies and laws that create oppression and marginalization where the full brutality of patriarchal ideologies are used to eradicate their very existence (Logan, 2015; Eberts, 2016). These policies around residential schools, reserves, pass systems, and laws under the criminal code were used to legally clear the lands for farmers, private property and business owners during the early colonial settlement stages (Logan, 2015; Lowman & Barker, 2015). The spatial containment of Indigenous people was how land clearing was attained. The subsequent reserve system along with residential schools broke down the very spirit of Indigenous women disconnecting them from the land and their roles in the family, parenting, transmission of knowledge, language, culture, and ceremonies (Lowman & Barker, 2015). Riel-Johns (2016) stated,

Once the *Indian Act* was passed, the responsibilities of our men and women changed drastically. As a result of being confined to reserve, our traditional men and women lost their responsibilities in using their strengths, either physically or mentally. Women were thought of as property by our O:gweho: we men who became acculturated into believing that they had to think like the white men. The entitlement to status under the *Indian Act* itself enabled that to happen, wherein the male would gain status, and his wife and children would gain his status. (pp.38)

The vulnerability of Indigenous women during this time was the goal of colonization, to render them so weak to the point that they would submit to the dominant culture and abide by the rules of the white man. (Logan, 2015; Razack, 2000). The *Indian Act* essentially was a full-on

attack of matriarchal societies and Indigenous women and girls were the epicenter of their destruction. This form of gender-based discrimination defined by Driskill, Finley, Gilley and Morgensen (2011) as "biopower" was used to colonize Indigenous women through targeting "their sexuality, race, and gender." (p.31) Reinforcement of biopower is evident in discrimination, racism, stereotypes, bigotry, and violence and the ongoing sexualization of Indigenous women that are still prevalent in our society some 250 years later (Riel-Johns, 2016; Bennett, 2016).

This historical context is important, to understand how Indigenous women were targeted through toxic patriarchal ideologies to break down their identity. It sets the framework to dive deeper into the issue of sexual exploitation and human trafficking. This next section will explore how Canadian policies not only created this problem for Indigenous women but how such policies continue to be main contributors to this issue through the *Indian Act* and recent changes made to the Criminal Code of Canada.

Definition of Child Abuse and Sexual Exploitation

It is noted that this review of the literature focuses on youth, while the participants in the research study project are adult women. However, this literature is relevant because many women exploited in the sex industry have experienced recruitment as minors where sexual exploitation continued into their adult years (Bittle, 2002; Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC), 2008).

In current society, when the word child abuse comes up, the immediate thought is the victimization of vulnerable young children. Few people are aware that sexual exploitation is, in fact, a form of child abuse. Kinsley and Mark (2002) support this statement by explaining that 86% of Canadians are aware that youth under the age of 18 are sexually exploited, however not

as many understand that this is a form of child abuse nor do they comprehend the risks connected to the sexual exploitation of minors. The Child and Family Services Manual (CFSM) (2014), defines child abuse as,

It is the act or omission by a person that results in the physical injury to a child, emotional disability of a permanent nature or likely to result in such a disability or sexual exploitation of a child with or without a child's consent. (s.1)

The United Nations Glossary on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (UNGSEA) (2017) also state that child sexual abuse encompasses a variety of acts such as rape, sexual assault, sexual intercourse, or sexual activity with a minor under the age of 18 years old. When looking at the definition of child abuse, and the acts of abuse that occurs, sexual exploitation meets this criterion. The definition of sexual exploitation varies from country to country, and community to community. However, for this study, the definitions provided come from global, national, and local organizations. The United Nations provides a global perspective that translates from country to county. Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) offers an Indigenous Canadian view, and the Child and Family Services Manual provide a provincial perspective. All organizational definitions combined to produce a clear picture of what sexual exploitation is.

The definition of sexual exploitation in the UNGSEA (2017) speaks of "the exchange of money, employment, goods or services for sex, including sexual favors and other forms of humiliating, degrading or exploitive behavior" (p. 7). NWAC (2008), explains that there are two streams in which sexual exploitation takes place. One, through the commercial stream that includes an exchange of food, drugs, clothing, and shelter for sex acts. Two, the non-commercial stream where individuals in a position of authority or power over another person occur where the

purchasing of gifts or enticements and promises for not disclosing to anyone is used to keep victims silent.

Other forms of sexual exploitation as defined by CFSM (2014) is sex trafficking, sex tourism, child pornography, modeling, and internet luring. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2018) adds to this by indicating how sex trafficking is one of four forms of human trafficking; with the other three being “forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs” (para.6). Despite the other forms of human trafficking, this study focuses specifically on sex trafficking. Sex trafficking as stated by UNODC (2018) is

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. (para. 2)

Sex tourism takes place where perpetrators specifically travel to other countries or in the borders of their country, with the intent to actively seek minors for sexual contact (CFSM, 2014).

Although CFSM (2014) uses the term child pornography, Beyond Borders (2016) instead uses sexual abuse images as this further illustrates that this is a form of child abuse where children cannot provide consent in comparison to child pornography, which implies consent. As such, the term sexual abuse images will be used going forward. Sexual abuse images are a form of sexual exploitation where video recordings depicting sexual assaults of minors are either produced or distributed. This distribution of such images serves to perpetuate the ongoing

re-victimization of the minor due to multiple perpetrators having access to the sexual abuse images, immediate access to the internet, level of availability, and other forms of media that make it easily accessible (CFSM, 2014). Child modeling is not sexual abuse images of a minor; however, it is an issue due to the sexually suggestive nature exposed to children that creates a level of vulnerability for them. CFSM (2014) suggests that child modeling is a tactic that is used to groom and manipulate children into sexual abuse images, therefore raises the concerns connected to child modeling. Lastly, internet luring is where perpetrators actively search the internet seeking out vulnerable children or youth with intentions of manipulating them into engaging in sex acts over the internet or entice to meet them in person where they are sexually assaulted (CFSM, 2018).

These definitions only serve to provide an outline for what sexual exploitation is and the different ways in which this form of child abuse occurs. However, despite growing literature on this issue, there are still common misconceptions in society that sexual exploitation is not a form of child abuse as mentioned above. Before the 1990s, minors were viewed as child prostitutes and seen as offenders, not victims (Bittle, 2002). Just the very thought of minors being called child prostitutes sends a message into society that they made a conscious choice to be involved in the sex industry, and that the abuse they experienced was consensual, therefore, not viewed as a form of child abuse (Beyond Borders, 2016). These beliefs and attitudes from Canadians about youth who are being sexually exploited only perpetuate the issue further because it is not taken seriously due to the stigmas associated with the sex industry that has been present for hundreds of years (Kingsley & Mark, 2000). The reality is that at such a young age, youth are being exploited based on their vulnerabilities, it is not deviant behaviors, or by their choosing, it is an

issue where their survival is determined by the exchange of their bodies (Kingsley & Mark, 2000).

With the definition of child abuse and sexual exploitation providing further context into the complexities involved in this issue, the goal is to continue to break down the societal perceptions that sexual exploitation is not a form of child abuse. Communities have made progress in the last twenty years, and acknowledgment is required. However, it is clear more is needed to address this problem further. One area that is often not talked about in literature are the individuals that are behind this form of child abuse. The following section will take a glimpse into the perpetrators of this crime and shed further light on why the sexual exploitation of minors takes place.

Who is Being Targeted for Sexual Exploitation?

The sexual exploitation of children and youth can happen to both males and females; however, women and female children are overrepresented in the statistics on sexual exploitation. The UNGSEA (2017), concept of gender-based violence links women and girls at higher risk of violence and sexual exploitation to patriarchal attitudes and institutions around the world. Men and young boys can also be targeted for sexual exploitation and have experiences of gender violence connected to homophobia or gay-bashing (Franssen, & O'Brien, 2014; McIntyre, 2005). In Winnipeg, the "Stop Sex with Kids" (SSK) campaign conducted a study in 2000, which estimated that there was 400 youth identified as being sexually exploited. Out of the 400 youth, "85-90% were female with 10-15% being males" (SSK, 2000, para 1). Although these statistics are 18 years old, more recent information indicates that these statistics have not changed. Between 2007-2013 "worldwide, 98% of sex trafficking victims are women and girls," and in

2013 all sex trafficking offenses that went before the courts involved female victims (Franssen & O'Brien, 2014, p. 17).

When looking at the average age youth are targeted for sexual exploitation, accurate information that represents the age of girls is difficult to find. There are a variety of authors and published documents over the last 20 years that indicate the average age is 15-16.5 years old, however more recent literature indicates it is much younger, 12-13 years (Bittle, 2002; Franssen & O'Brien, 2014). In my professional experience, some girls are younger than 12. Franssen and O'Brien, (2014) support this statement as they mention some women identified sexual exploitation occurring as young as nine years old. What is evident, with the available statistics over the last 20 years, is traffickers and pimps target younger females due to buyers of sex demanding minors; and as a result, the average age females are exposed to sexual exploitation continues to drop (Franssen & O'Brien, 2014).

Risk Factors for Sexual Exploitation

Understanding the risk factors for sexually exploited youth shifts the focus to the vulnerability of some youth and discards the concept of deviant behavior. The Justice Institute of British Columbia (JIBC) (2002) indicates the environment, geography, health, genetic endowment, coping skills, social environment, social supports, income, social status, gender and being Indigenous as some of the risk factors that create vulnerabilities in minors. Bittle (2002) adds to this list by highlighting that there is a connection for money that is a link to homelessness, situational poverty, unemployment, below-average education, inadequate social services and lack of autonomy. Other contributing factors include family-related alcohol issues, physical and emotional abuse as well as sexual abuse, high rate of suicide attempts, and poor mental health (Bittle, 2002).

One risk factor that requires further attention is understanding how sexual abuse in childhood potentially increases a youth's vulnerability to sexual exploitation. The risk nearly doubles for minors who have experienced childhood sexual abuse and increases their risk to exposure; however, this does not determine the outcomes for children who experienced this form of abuse (Bittle, 2002). In Winnipeg of the 400 youth identified as being sexually exploited, the study indicated that out of the 400 youth, 52% experienced childhood sexual abuse (SSK, 2000). These statistics support Bittle's analysis (2002) by pointing out more than half of identified victims had a history of childhood sexual abuse that increased their risk of exposure to sexual exploitation.

With the extensive list of risk factors found in the literature, only a few included colonization or colonial ideologies (JIBC, 2000; Bennet, 2016). The truth is, there is an overrepresentation of Indigenous women and girls in Canada that have experienced sexual exploitation due to colonization and patriarchal ideologies as a significant risk factor that few authors speak about (Razack, 2000). The risks posed towards Indigenous women and girls deserve special attention due to the historical ramifications that specifically targeted them through gendered, racial violence (Razack, 2000).

Sexual Exploitation of Indigenous Women and Girls

Females in general are at greater risk of being sexually exploited, however being born Indigenous in a colonial state adds another layer of risk. Indigenous women make up approximately 14-60 percent of identified victims who are being sexually exploited or trafficked across Canada. However, these statistics are not entirely accurate due to the underground nature of the sex industry (Bourgeois, 2015). This overrepresentation of Indigenous women did not just happen because of personal choice to enter the sex industry, the root of this problem is that

colonization created the space for this form of gender-based violence to exist (Eberts, 2016). Indigenous women are painted with the same brush through racist, and discriminatory perceptions that they all live high-risk lifestyles. This perception is entrenched in policies, laws and Canadian attitudes regarding Indigenous people of Canada (Eberts, 2017). Government policies and societal attitudes define Indigenous women to the point that future generations grow up with no sense of real identity, of who they are as strong Indigenous women (Adams, 1999; Helin, 2008; Alfred, 2009).

Indigenous identity continues to be targeted by a colonial system and as a result, Indigenous women and girls experience low self-esteem, cultural and familial fragmentation, substance abuse, poverty, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, homelessness (Seshia, 2005; Franssen & O'Brian, 2014). This fragmentation results from the legacy of residential schools, Child and Family Services (multiple placements), intergenerational sexual exploitation and trauma, the justice system, and medias negative portrayal of Indigenous people (Seshia, 2005; Franssen & O'Brian, 2014). Bittle (2002) further adds that Indigenous youth are over-represented in the sex industry because of leaving their community, having access to limited resources, education and job skill where they ended up on the street with few options to support one's self (NWAC, 2008). This overrepresentation also ties into the risk factors discussed earlier, creating a more complex layer of oppression that increases the risk of Indigenous women and girls to be targeted for sexual exploitation.

The oppression involved in sexual exploitation and human trafficking is a societal issue as violence is a social construct through colonization (Fraser & Seymour 2017). Power and control over Indigenous women's bodies are located within politics, laws, and practices that are patriarchal and supports white supremacy, colonization, land, gender, religion, economics, class,

and immigration/migration. The damage caused by toxic patriarchal ideologies on Indigenous women's identities is evident through the extreme forms of violence that targets their culture, language, ceremonies, connection to the land, and their autonomy (Eberts, 2015). When compared to non-Indigenous Canadian women, "they experience the highest rates of sexual and racialized violence and exploitation, incarceration, murder, poverty, under housing, homelessness, and underserved in health and education" (De Finney, 2017, p. 10).

To fully understand the scope of how patriarchal ideologies and colonial tactics under the *Indian Act* oppress Indigenous women and girls, it is crucial to investigate the past, where this all began. In doing so, it creates a clearer understanding of how sexual exploitation and human trafficking of Indigenous women and girls started, and the perpetuation through the colonial state. The next section attempts to break this down, by providing the historical context and important connection to be made to show the link between Canada's involvement in the sexual exploitation and human trafficking of Indigenous women and girls.

Canada Versus Indigenous Women: Sexual Exploitation and Human Trafficking

The level of violence that Indigenous women experience is a direct result of the *Indian Act* that is still prevalent in our society to this day. It has created an atmosphere where sexual exploitation and human trafficking rendered the victimization of Indigenous women invisible within the justice system (Eberts, 2017). Sexual exploitation and human trafficking is not just something that happened overnight; this was over 500 years in the making. Sexual exploitation of Indigenous women started with racist and discriminatory messages being planted by the government and churches that led people to believe they were dangerous and sinister in comparison to the white woman who required protection to breed the pure race (Razack, 2000; Logan, 2015).

As mentioned above, Indigenous women resisted colonization, and the message sent to colonial settlements was to fear them, defining them as "deviant and perceived as the squaw who is one that is faceless, lustful, immoral and dirty" (Eberts, 2017, p.71). The other perspective was the Pocahontas effect where Indigenous women chose the white man over herself and family requiring the management of their sexuality by the state due to having no control over this themselves (Driskill et al., 2011). Indigenous women's identity was stripped down as sub-human "backward, uncivilized...inherently worthless to dominant society. These racist and sexist ideologies created a space where [they] were for taking sexually without consequence" (Bourgeoisism, 2015, p. 1445). The policies and laws that broke down the Indigenous women's bodies are all located within the *Indian Act* and justified through these racist and discriminatory perceptions created by the government,

The policies created out of the *Indian Act* used to target Indigenous women's identity are found in the Reserves, pass systems, Residential schools, and criminal justice system where they all contribute to the trafficking and selling of Indigenous women's bodies (Bourgeoisism, 2015). The reserves were used to break down Indigenous women's traditional roles in the community as they were set up to operate like European societies where Patriarchal ideologies are enforced and monitored. The reserves governed by the Indian agent ensured that the traditional customs of women's roles are crippled, and that the containment of their sexuality could be regulated (Pocahontas/Squaw) (Bourgeoisism, 2015).

Gender role inequalities, and spatial containment of Indigenous women through the reserve system and later the inner city, is connected to sexual exploitation and historical origins of colonialism (Razack, 2000; Logan, 2015). White men who oversaw the pass system limited the mobility of Indigenous men and women in and out of the reserves. This vulnerability and

lack of access to food rations placed women and children in desperate situations where they would be sexually exploited to feed their family or violently beaten with no consequence from the government (Razack, 2000; Eberts, 2017).

The implementation of the residential school system was also a way to separate Indigenous children from their mothers to sever the transmission of knowledge from generation to generation and control Indigenous women through the separation of their children (Blaney & Grey, 2017). This separation took place with the forced removal of Indigenous people from the land onto reserves. The segregation and control of Indigenous women's bodies. The confinement of children in residential schools where sexual abuse was rampant are all prime examples of Canada's involvement in creating policies that support the sexual exploitation and human trafficking of Indigenous women and their children (Blaney & Grey, 2017).

Canada's criminal justice system refuses to recognize the discriminatory and racist perceptions of Indigenous women where laws are created to protect the perpetrators and the colonial structures (Razack, 2000). An example of this is the amendment made to the *Indian Act* in 1892. Prostitution-related charges under "public nuisance" (provincial; lesser charges and jail times) were changed to charges based on "morality" (Federal; sever charges and longer jail times) (Blaney & Grey, 2017, pp. 265). This change in the law targets Indigenous women as another way in which to control their bodies. Due to the racist and discriminatory messages about Indigenous women having no control over their sexuality, or having loose morals around their bodies, this created an environment where raping, murdering, or harming them became normal (Bourgeois, 2015).

Take the case of Pamela George's murder in 1995. During the court proceedings, her life was reduced to being an immoral sub-human living a high-risk lifestyle due to her involvement

in the sex industry. While the perceptions made regarding white men who murdered were that they were stand-up citizens with the perceptions that things just got out of hand (Blaney & Grey, 2017; Razack, 2000). The reality is, "When non-Indigenous commentators allude to the "high-risk lifestyles" of Indigenous women, they usually mean to imply that the women engage in prostitution. However, the lives of all Indigenous women are high risk, thanks to the instrument of colonialism that is the *Indian Act*" (Eberts, 2017, p. 69). The historical consequences of Canada not taking legal action to protect Indigenous women erases and exonerates perpetrators from this crime and creates a void where the women have become invisible within the justice system (Bourgeois, 2015; Razack, 2000).

"Human trafficking is just the new name of a historical problem" when the reality is, the sexual exploitation and human trafficking of Indigenous women "remains invisible, it lacks in community supports, and apathy to properly address this crime" (Bourgeois, 2015, p. 1432; Blaney & Grey, 2017). In 2012 the Government of Canada released a report under the National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking in Canada (NAPCHT). This action plan outlined in detail how to address international trafficking by supporting resources to programs that work with victims who entered Canada under illegitimate or exploitive work (Bourgeois, 2015). However, the focus of this action plan is to protect international and foreign bodies, not the bodies of Indigenous women who are trafficked across Canada in the sex industry. This lack of commitment to address this crime is evident in the changes made in 2014 to the Criminal Code of Canada around sexual exploitation and human trafficking regarding the concept of "fear for one's life as a criteria for inclusion.

As a professional in this line of work around sexual exploitation and human trafficking, an initial immediate concern regarding victims who had to prove they were in fear for their lives

or the lives of others for human trafficking charges to be laid against the perpetrator. Bourgeoisism (2015) also shares this concern identifying how traffickers are grooming victims by posing as a boyfriend rather than the traditional portrayal of a pimp often seen in media. Not everyone is in FEAR of their lives when being trafficked.

Although changes to the Criminal Code of Canada indicates that they are recognizing this is an issue in Canada and attempts made in the NAPCHT they are still missing a significant piece. Until the Government of Canada recognizes their part in how Indigenous women are made vulnerable through colonization, and the tactics used to suffocate them through the *Indian Act* that is still prevalent today, they cannot adequately address this issue. The reality is, "The *Indian Act* continues to irradiate law enforcement for all Indigenous women" (Eberts, 2017, p. 70). The government perpetuates the stereotypes that are in the laws created out of the *Indian Act*, along with the discrimination that is still prevalent in our society today. If they did not perpetuate this, this level of violence towards Indigenous women would not exist (Eberts, 2017). These laws and policies prove to perpetuate the problem of sexual exploitation and human trafficking and therefore, Indigenous women's identity is continuously targeted by government actions that continue to shape the violence they experience with a moral justification for systemic violence.

Perpetrators of Sexual Exploitation

When looking at the motivations of why men purchase sex or traffickers sexually exploit women and girls, the literature is limited. Thus, it creates restrictions to the development of better prevention programming, or strategies to make it more difficult for buyers and traffickers to sexually exploit women (Franssen & O'Brian, 2014). There is a level of protecting the buyers and traffickers due to it being rooted deeply in patriarchal policies, laws, and governance in the community where again the divides between gender are clear (Razack, 2000). This is an

important aspect to consider when looking at perpetrators due to patriarchal ideologies that fuels the demand side of the sex industry that creates the invisibility of men from this form of gender-based violence.

Patriarchy is an ideological perspective that centers male patrilineal lineage over matriarchal lineages in a society based on male supremacy within governance, societal structures, authority, leadership, property, and social privileges that exclude women. Women living in patriarchal societies are created to be docile and meek; therefore, they require the protection of men to not only care for them but to provide all the necessities of life (Stevenson, 2011). This ideological perspective creates a massive power imbalance where women and children are the property of the men, and as a result, are significantly disadvantaged in all aspects of social living and having any form of personal autonomy over their own lives (Stevenson, 2011). Patriarchal ideologies create a separation between males and females based on sex where control through male domination exposes women to various forms of gender-based violence such as domestic violence, rape, assaults, exploitation and murder (Razack, 2000). Through the understanding of what patriarchy is, it is evident how a male dominated society creates the justification to perpetrate violence against women and children with little or no remorse.

The definition of the perpetrator can vary from country to country, including actions defined in the offence committed. There is minimal research available that focuses on the perpetrators, and as a result, it creates limited insights (Franssen & O'Brian, 2014). With the use of the following articles the UNGSEA and, "No More" Ending Sex Trafficking in Canada, an attempt at defining perpetrators and shedding light onto who they are is important. The UNGSEA (2017), defines perpetrator as it relates to sexual exploitation and human trafficking as the following,

A person (or group of persons) who commits an act of sexual exploitation or other type of crime or offence. Under International Human Rights Law, perpetrator can refer also to state institutions, entities or agents that failed to meet human rights obligations. (p. 12)

Who is purchasing or trafficking people for sex? The majority are males from varying backgrounds and ethnicities, from blue- and white-collar professionals, to gangs and ranging in age from as young as 19 and up (Franssen & O'Brian, 2014). Why do why people purchase sex? (also known as "buyers, johns, clients, or sex customers," little information is available (Franssen & O'Brian, 2014). Despite literature lacking in motives, Razack (2000) suggests that this goes beyond immediate sexual gratification, instead, she proposes that these motives are intrinsic in patriarchal societies that encourage male domination over women, supports aggression, violence, and masculinity that is promoted in the purchasing of sex where one can establish "mastery and control that is intrinsically colonial" (p. 107-108).

In comparison to the motivations of those who purchase sex where minimal literature is available and motivations are ill defined for traffickers, the motives are much clearer. There is a massive profit margined involved in the selling and trafficking of bodies for sex. "According to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), traffickers share one thing in common: they want to make money. Victims are forced to hand over \$500 - \$1000 per day (and sometimes as much as \$2,000 per day), 365 days per year, with the trafficker keeping most of this money" (Franssen & O'Brian, 2014, p. 36). If the math is done correctly with the highest number taken from this data, that is a total of \$730,000. This estimate is determined based on one victim alone; however, most traffickers and pimps have multiples victims (Franssen & O'Brian, 2014). With four victims added into this calculation, it is even more evident the amount of profit made, it is estimated to be at \$2,920,000 per year.

Canada and other western countries are a male-dominated societies where this form of sexual abuse is a crime. When looking at the other side of sexual exploitation. So much focus has been on how to help women and minors leave the sex industry, yet, how can moving forward in addressing this issue be done when the underlying tone from the government to the community still protects this male-dominated crime. Looking at this issue from only one side does little justice to the victims and survivors, along with the inability to create proper prevention and intervention strategies.

Healing from Sexual Exploitation

It is evident within the literature that since 2000 there is more awareness of and research into issues and factors related to sexual exploitation. There have been task forces developed to combat this, along with government reports, community research where narrative approaches captured the voices of women and girls on what they need, to recommendations and implementation of programs. What became apparent was a common theme in the literature that to address the needs of sexually exploited women and youth, it is necessary to focus on two categories, prevention, and intervention.

First, prevention strategies require an educational component that is accessible to professionals in the health, justice, child welfare, and front-line workers on the realities of sexual exploitation and how to identify when youth are at risk of sexual exploitation or human trafficking. Another prevention for youth to reduce the risk of being targeted for sexual exploitation and human trafficking is through education, mentorship, access to Indigenous culture, and employment opportunities (NWAC, 2008; JIBC, 2000; Kingsley & Mark, 2000).

Kingsley and Mark's (2000) used the voices of different youth involved in their study both on- and-off reserve. The following quote sums up the importance of culturally relevant programming geared towards intervention and prevention,

The youth also emphasized the important role of cultural connection in preventing commercial sexual exploitation. Many youth felt that Aboriginal peoples in Canada face a high degree of racism, and that prevention therefore necessitates the cooperation of the Aboriginal community in educating and helping youth. Building self-esteem through cultural connection is of long-term benefit to the whole community of Canada, both for Native and non-Native peoples. (p.58)

While there are some Indigenous informed agencies, there are not enough of them. There is still a significant gap in services that do not take seriously the need for more culturally reflective services for Indigenous youth and women who are needing services for leaving their exploitive situations. JIBC (2000) supports this statement by identifying the lack of government support or other funding as deeply rooted in colonial ties that do not see Indigenous people.

Access to culture is necessary for prevention and intervention approaches. However, what is missing was the Indigenous voice being at the forefront of all these initiatives. With having a better understanding of colonialism and the effects this has had on Indigenous women and girls, few articles focused on how Indigenous cultural values could be instrumental in the healing. NWAC (2008) and JIBC (2002), and Kingsley and Mark (2000), all make mention of the importance of returning to the land, Indigenous knowledge, cultural services such as the sweat lodge, ceremonies, access to Elders, pow wows, drumming, dance groups, and Indigenous experiential women as mentors. However, the connection to why and how this is instrumental to the prevention of or intervention in sexual exploitation is missing altogether. The literature lacks

specific detail of how Indigenous culture can help with the healing of sexually exploited women and youth. There is, however, the information available on trauma, and how returning to ceremonies such as the sweat lodge and Full Moon can aid in healing.

Healing can take many forms, however, when looking at trauma and the intergenerational trauma experienced by Indigenous peoples, we must acknowledge the need for reclamation of identity (Marsh, Marsh, Ozawagosh & Ozawagosh, 2018). “Trauma can destroy the bonds and connections individuals have with themselves, others and the world,” this disconnection from one’s self further isolates a person into feeling they are the ones to blame, leading to self-hatred, and guilt (Marsh et al., 2018, p. 11). Reclamation of identity for Indigenous peoples is at the heart of healing, it requires uncovering “traditional values, beliefs, philosophies and ideologies” that can be found within healing practices through traditional ceremonies and teachings (Marsh et al., 2018, p. 2). There are varying definitions of what traditional healing is; however, The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) provides a clear definition as:

Practices designed to promote mental, physical, and spiritual well-being that are based on beliefs which go back to the time before the spread of Western ‘scientific’ biomedicine. When Indigenous peoples in Canada talk about traditional healing, they include a wide range of activities, from physical cures using herbal medicines and other remedies, to the promotion of psychological and spiritual well-being using ceremony, counselling and the accumulated wisdom of Elders. (p. 348)

The restoration of Indigenous traditions and ceremonies are critical aspects for interventions regarding intergenerational trauma, substance abuse, mental and physical health, sexual abuse, and spiritual wellbeing (Marsh, et al., 2018). The disruption of Indigenous culture, and the disconnection from the land and ceremonies is a colonial tool to disenfranchise Canada’s

Indigenous population (Coulthard, 2006). Without acknowledging this colonial connection, the issues presenting itself around the need for healing falls onto the individual, rather than seeing it as a systemic issue across the country. Cultural identity is found within Indigenous traditional practices, being connected to the land, restoring one's language, and connections to one another along with the courage it takes to stand up for what is inherently right where no permission is required (Coulthard, 2006). The sweat lodge is an example of returning to traditional knowledge systems that promote not only healing but the balancing of one's mind, body, spirit, and emotions (Marsh, et al., 2018).

Sweat Lodge Ceremony

The sweat lodge ceremony is not just known to Canada's Indigenous populations; the practices are different amongst tribes and cultures across the globe from Africa, New Guinea, New Mexico and across tribes throughout the US. The use of the sweat lodge has historical significance and a multitude of expressions from preparation for war, hunting, bathing, cleansing one spirit, coming of age, Sundance, and those seeking guidance and healing (Colmant & Merta, 1999). What is understood regarding the experiences of participating inside the sweat lodge, is this ceremony opens a line of communication to ancestors and Creator, this is done with the use of medicines, grandfathers, and grandmothers (rocks) along with prayer songs and teachings that keep individuals spiritually safe. The sweat lodge's teachings can differ from elder-to-elder and tribe-to-tribe, however, typically the sweat lodge is conducted with four rounds where medicines (water, sage, cedar, tobacco) is poured over grandfathers and grandmothers that creates a steam vapor that heats the space. Songs and teachings, along with storytelling and sharing circles, take place inside the sweat lodge (Colmant & Merta, 1999; Marsh et al., 2018).

There is minimal research done that looks at the longer-term benefits and effects the sweat lodge has on participants. However, some research studies attempted to look at this further. Colmant and Merta, (1999) conducted a longitudinal study with male youth who experienced intergenerational trauma and were involved in the sweat lodge ceremony. They reported that "There were moments of hope, universality, imparting of information, altruism, development of socializing techniques, imitative behavior, group cohesiveness, catharsis, and existential factors" (Colmant & Merta, 1999, p.69). Another study by Marsh et al., (2018) involved participants who had experienced intergenerational trauma and substance abuse. Marsh et al., (2018) reported that the participants who experienced the sweat lodge expressed "remarkable and moving experiences, including emotional, and physical relief of painful experiences" (p.17).

The sweat lodge offers the opportunity for Indigenous women and girls who have experienced sexual exploitation a safe place to reclaim who they are. Future treatment and programs that provide interventions must provide a space for healing that is culturally reflective and holistic. Due to the historical exclusions that have taken place, inclusivity is critical for Indigenous people (Marsh et al., 2018). The sweat lodge ceremony is only one of many other traditional ceremonies that offer healing and a sense of identity and purpose. Another ceremony that is significant for this research is the Full Moon ceremony.

Full Moon Ceremony

Many teachings come with the Full Moon ceremony, and that no one teaching is right or wrong. Elders and knowledge keepers have taught me that they are all right. The Full Moon teachings that I have personally received come from an Ojibwe Elder, these teachings will be interlaced within this description due to a lack of literature available to show how the Full Moon

can help with healing. What is very apparent, and as mentioned above, identity is integral to the healing process (Marsh et al., 2018). The Full Moon ceremony is about one's identity as a woman and our relationship to grandmother moon. McAdams (2009) explains that when a young woman starts puberty or her menstrual cycle, she is taken to sit with the female Elders or an older woman who prepares her and teaches her about what it means to be a woman and what to expect as she continues to grow. She taught about "love, honesty, compassion, and honor to keep the integrity and strength of the home...creation stories, roles of women, women's laws, and other relevant teachings." (McAdams, 2009, p.31). When a woman or young girl goes through her menstruation, it is either called her Grandmother Time or Moon Time, depending on tribal beliefs. Some women are not to do any form of work as it is acknowledged this is a time of rest and renewal due to being in ceremony (McAdams, 2009). During other ceremonies that are not women-focused, women who are on their Moon time do not participate in ceremonies. However, when attending ceremonies while being on their Moon time, designated locations are set up for women, so they are still a part of the community. It is understood that this practice is due to women being so powerful on their Moon Time that they are already in a very sacred ceremony where they are cleansing their body, mind, spirit, and emotions (McAdams, 2009).

The one ceremony that is specific to women, regardless of being on their moon time, is the Full Moon ceremony. It is specifically intended for women to honor their cycle and their connection to Grandmother Moon. There are special prayers given to mother earth, the songs sung, and teachings that honor not only the beauty of being a life-giver, but the responsibility women have to the water. This introduction into the Full Moon ceremony provides a glimpse into the significance of this ceremony and how important it is for Indigenous women and girls to have access to them. In my professional experience, loss of culture, teachings, and identity as an

Indigenous woman has made so many vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Further research is required to identify how ceremonies like the full moon ceremony are beneficial for healing Indigenous women and girls from complex trauma and the devastating effects of colonization.

Conclusion

The sexual exploitation of Indigenous women and girls is prevalent in Canadian society through policies, laws, and practice that are racist and discriminatory. The over representation of Indigenous women and girls in this form of gender-based violence requires immediate attention and includes Indigenous knowledges to heal the women and girls that experienced this and to prevent the further perpetuation of sexual exploitation and human trafficking from occurring in Canada.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Research Question

The research question that guides this study is: How do Indigenous ceremonies and teachings contribute to the healing needs of sexually exploited women?

Indigenous Methodologies

Indigenous research methodologies are rooted in Indigenous world views and knowledge that guides the research process. Indigenous world views are about being in relationship to the land, the spirit of all living and non-living beings, it is found in the voices of the collective, and respect for all people and the gifts they carry (Hart, 2010; Kovach, 2015). Indigenous knowledge is holistic, oral, and local, it is created through the gifts of the land that shapes our perceptions, values, ways of knowing, and how we see the world and ourselves in it as Indigenous people. (Hart, 2010).

To conduct my research through Indigenous methodologies, I drew on Hart's (2010) framework. He broke down ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology through an Indigenous perspective. **Ontology** for Indigenous people is situated in our beliefs found in nature. It is also the reality of our being and how we see the world (dreams, visions, spirits, ancestors) and our relationship with one another. Indigenous **epistemology** is how we think of our reality; it is oral traditions that have been passed down from our ancestors. It is our experiences that shape us from the teachings we revive through visions, prayer, being on the land, attending ceremonies, and through the sacred foods (Hart, 2010). Indigenous **methodology** centers the Indigenous researcher where they can "be who they are while they are actively engaged as participants in the research process" (Weber-Pillwax, 2001, in Hart, 2010, p. 9). Through Indigenous knowledge, my research process focused on relationships that we're accountable to "all my relations" that went beyond this

physical world and tapped into the cosmos and spirit world (Hart, 2010, p.9). Accountability to the community and the knowledge gained through this research process required good intentions that were respectful and truly benefited the broader community (Hart, 2010). **Axiology** is the ethics on how to conduct the research that is accountable to Indigenous communities, Elders and research participants. There were several ethical principles that were required to guide my research: Indigenous control over the research, respect, reciprocity, safety, non-intrusive observations, deeper listening, non-judgment, honor, self-awareness, and subjectivity (Hart, 2010).

By using this framework, it held me accountable for the research that I conducted, and it provided me with guidance for reflection, analyzing, communication with Elders and the intent of this research remained respectful, heartfelt, spiritual and relevant to the participants and community. It was important for me as the researcher going through this process that Indigenous ceremony and traditional teachings were honored and became an integral part of how the research not only unfolded, but the process from beginning to end included ceremonial process.

The Significance of Relationships

Indigenous research methodologies are not just about conducting research; it is about being in ceremony and respecting the emotional, spiritual, physical and mental aspects of participants and the researcher (Bell, 2018; Hart, 2010). Relationships are the key to Indigenous research approaches as it is required to locate one's self within the emotional connections made to one another otherwise, the research would hold no meaning, heartbeat, or spirit (Bell, 2018). Kovach (2015), states, "Research, like life, is about relationships." (p. 148). The relationships that were developed during the research transcend the individual experiences we have as humans; it was about being in a relationship with Creator, the spirit world, our ancestors, and the understanding that all living and non-living beings are connected through relationships. Based on the knowledge

around relationships, the participants were treated with integrity, respect, honor, kindness, and for their strengths and gifts, they carry as women. The Creator was given thanks through prayer, personal sacrifice through ceremonies, fasting, and placing tobacco down to honor this process. I had ongoing contact with our Knowledge Keeper, who was also on my advisory committee where the relationship guided me and held me accountable to myself, participants, community, Elders, and Creator.

Participant Criteria

Participants initially included fifteen Indigenous women who identified as cisgender or transgender females: a) being Metis, First Nations or Inuit, b) 18 and older -, c) had experiences in the sex industry (street/online sex trade, massage parlors, pornography, exotic dancing, or experienced forms human trafficking) as either a youth under 18 years of age, or as an adult and d) and we're open to learning more about Indigenous ceremonies and teachings. The Participants who were part of this research ranged from having previous experience in traditional Indigenous ceremonies to having no experience. Participants signed a consent form and confidentiality agreement indicating that any information shared by others in the research activities would not be shared with anyone else, ensuring the confidentiality of the participants.

Recruitment

Recruitment flyers (Appendix I) and study background information (Appendix J) were provided to local organizations in Winnipeg, Manitoba, who worked with the women that identify as having experiences in the sex industry. The receptionists at community-based organizations were provided with the research flyers and a series of envelopes with further information regarding the research for interested participants. The organizations that were contacted include KLINIC, SAGE House, New Directions (TERF), Dream Catchers, Sexually

Exploited Youth Community Coalition and North End Women's Centre. Due to my professional experiences in the area of sexual exploitation, I have developed relationships with community organizations, professionals, and supportive relationships with participants where respect has been developed through my work. A screening tool (see Appendix B) was used to screen participants to ensure they have met study criteria. Data gathered from, the screening tool and one-to-one interviews assisted with demographics around age range, youth or adult involvement in the sex industry, Indigenous identity, and willingness to participate in the ceremony. The sharing of this screening tool was done either in person or over the phone. It was dependent on what participants felt most comfortable with and allowed the opportunity for any questions they may had to be answered about the research.

Data Gathering and Confidentiality

In terms of data, all participants were assigned an alphanumeric code that was used to identify all their screening tools, surveys, interviews as sound files, and transcripts. All data, including audio recordings and digital copies of the transcripts, were kept on a password-protected computer. The transcripts, notes, and consent forms were stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home office. The names of participants or signed documents were stored separately from the assigned alphanumeric code. The recordings and transcripts are to be kept for five years and stored securely in the researcher's home office in a password protected computer. Only the researcher and the researcher's advisory council (Mary Kate Dennis, Ed Azure and Jane Ursel) had access to these forms and would not share the information in these forms with anyone outside the research.

The following steps were taken to ensure the confidentiality of the participants

1. Any narratives of the participants cited in publications were identified by alphanumeric numbers.
2. Any participants' comments or narratives quoted in reports, articles, or other publications are to be stripped of identifying details, if removing these details distorts the data then these comments will not be cited publicly.

Due to the community of sexually exploited women being connected to various resources and programs in the city of Winnipeg, there was a chance participants would be identified by the information shared in the interviews as well as the organization who provided access to the research information. This was minimized by having participants sign a confidentiality form, that any information they may learn about others, or their identity was not be shared among others outside of the research. There were measures taken to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Also, it was a possibility that participants could feel triggered by some of the things discussed or their participation in ceremonies. A list of resources was provided (see Appendix F), and the researcher inquired about the support available to the participant, either an Elder or community agency. Any helpers used during the ceremonies, or gathering, along with transcription services were required to sign the confidentiality oath, that any information they may learn of the participants, or their identity would remain confidential.

Only the researcher and advisory council had access to the identifying information. The screening tool, survey, interviews, and transcripts did not have any identifying information and were assigned an alphanumeric code. Jane Ursel and Mary Kate Dennis are researchers and understand privacy and confidentiality in their own research. Ed Azure did not require access to the research materials; however, as an employee of the University of Manitoba, he assured that privacy and confidentiality were upheld when talking to him about research participants. Ed

Azure interacted with the participants in the building of the sweat lodge and through his role was aware of the importance of privacy and confidentiality within the research. All identified helpers were where required to sign the oath of confidentiality. The transcription serves have their own privacy statement, and upon completion of this research, a request was made to have all transcriptions permanently destroyed.

For participants who chose to withdraw, there were no consequences. Out of the initial 15 participants, 5 chose to leave the research, and as such, all their data, consent forms, and survey questionnaires were destroyed at their request. For the participants who left the research, none of their information was used in this study. Participants were provided an opportunity to withdraw from the research after they have received their transcripts for review as the last step prior to data analysis

Research Activities

Participants took part in a time commitment that included gathering on four days during the research process. They were provided with the opportunity to participate in a Full (Moon ceremony, building and participation in a sweat lodge, one-to-one interviews along with an optional half-day to make a ribbon skirt of their choosing. There was also two-half days at the opening and ending of the research data collection phase, where a water ceremony and feast took place to honor the women and their time committed to the research activities.

Table 1:*Participant involvement in gatherings*

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Water ceremony</u>	<u>Ribbon Skirt</u>	<u>Full Moon</u>	<u>Sweat Lodge</u>	<u>Interview</u>	<u>Total</u>
A1	1	1	0	1	1	4
A2	1	1	1	0	1	4
A3	1	0	1	1	1	4
A4	1	1	1	0	1	4
A5	1	1	1	0	1	4
A9	1	1	1	1	1	5
A11	1	1	1	1	1	5
A13	1	0	1	1	1	4
A14	1	1	1	1	1	4
A18	1	1	1	1	1	5
Total	10	8	9	7	10	

The time allotted to each half-day was approximately 3 hours, totaling 6 hours for both days combined. The optional day when participants made a ribbon skirt took approximately 4 hours. The ribbon skirt was not mandatory to wear during the ceremonies; however, it was an opportunity to learn about the ribbon skirt and the teachings that came with making one. The two gatherings focused on introducing participants to Indigenous ceremonies and teachings, which took place on two separate days where participation was required. The Full Moon ceremony was approximately 6 hours and took place in early spring on April 17, 2019, at the Inner-City Faculty of Social Work. The building of the sweat lodge also took place in the early spring, on May 10, 2019, at the University of Manitoba Fort Gary campus. The time frame given for building the sweat lodge was provided by Cree knowledge keeper, Ed Azure where he explained that Mother Earth would signal him to know when the land was ready by the buds on the trees emerging. When the buds emerged, this was the indication that it was time to take the women onto the land to build the sweat lodge. The time frame for building the sweat lodge was approximately 8 hours. For the participants who did not make a ribbon skirt and only attended the ceremonies, there was a combined total of 20 hours commitment made by them. For the women that also participated in

the ribbon skirt making and all the gatherings, they had a total of 24 hours' time commitment within the research.) Table about here

All ceremonies and teachings were facilitated by two Knowledge Keepers from the Master of Social Work Based in Indigenous Knowledges (MSW-IK) Program. Sherry Copenace is an employee of the University of Manitoba and has a Master of Social Work. Sherry is also highly knowledgeable around traditional Ojibwe ceremonies that makes her qualified to conduct the full moon ceremony. Ed Azure is also an employee of the University of Manitoba and has a wealth of experience within the community as a traditional Knowledge Keeper and was the Executive Director of an addiction's treatment center in Nelson House. Ed Azure also has a wealth of traditional Cree knowledge that makes him qualified to provide guidance in building and conducting the sweat lodge ceremony. The first gathering was facilitated by Sherry Copenace, Ojibway Knowledge Keeper, where she shared teachings and lead the Full Moon Ceremony. The second gathering was with Ed Azure, Cree Knowledge Keeper, where he facilitated the building and teachings of the sweat lodge. The following is a more detailed outline of the research instruments and activities that took place during the research process (see table 1 and 2 for more information about the participants).

Optional gatherings. The optional gatherings were designed to ensure that the women in this study had the opportunity to meet the other participants and because of the group activities they would be interacting closely with others. The gatherings provided an opportunity for the women to determine if they wanted to continue in the study. The resources for sexually exploited women are limited, and the services overlap so, the women may be known to one another, and some may have had past interactions or conflicts that would hinder their ability to participate in the study. Participation also allowed them to begin building relationships and rapport with one

another. Lastly, the honorariums of thirty dollars were not offered as an incentive to participate in these gatherings, and data was not gathered on these days to ensure their participation was voluntary.

Prior to Gathering One

The researcher reviewed with each participant the information sheet, consent form, and research questions in the first initial meeting and answered any questions the participant had during this process. When the participants agreed to the research after reviewing all the information, they then made a choice to sign the consent form and were given the date when the research activities started with Gathering One (which was optional to attend). Participants were also signed a consent form and confidentiality agreement indicating that any information shared by others in the research would not be shared with anyone else, ensuring the confidentiality of the participants.

Gathering One: Water Ceremony

Before the water ceremony, participants were provided with a script (see Appendix A) regarding further information about the research activities and time commitments. Opportunities for participants to ask questions about the research activities were given before signing consent forms. Once participants had completed signing the confidentiality and consent forms, the researcher did an opening prayer and offered tobacco ties to each participant. This was followed by a water ceremony and feast to honor the participants, creator, and Knowledge Keepers who were a part of this research. A talking circle was conducted by the researcher to introduce oneself and make connections with the participants in the group. This was not recorded.

Additionally, a survey questionnaire (see Appendix C) was provided to participants on the first gathering for them to fill out, or if they required assistance, to help them fill this out.

This was optional. The survey was to gather information before participating in the research around access to Elders, Indigenous teachings, ceremonies, coping, support systems, programs, and recommendations. This was to create a baseline of information before starting the research to determine at the end of the research if there were changes in thought processes and if new information emerged from their participation.

Gathering Two: Ribbon Skirt

Participants were provided with the opportunity to sew ribbon skirts in an optional half-day gathering. Teachings were shared on the meaning and significance of ribbon skirts in Indigenous culture. This was not a mandatory research event but provided opportunity to make one for ceremonies. Wearing a skirt during the research was optional, and not a requirement. If participants did not have a skirt and wanted to wear one during the ceremonies, one was provided by the researcher

Gathering Three: Full Moon

Participants gathered on the night of the Full Moon, on April 17, 2019, to learn from an Ojibway knowledge keeper by receiving women's teachings and participating in the Full Moon ceremony followed by a feast. Tobacco, yellow cloth, and feast food was provided along with a gift for the knowledge keepers conducting the teachings and women ceremony. Talking circles (see Appendix D) took place immediately after the two ceremonies (Full Moon and sweat lodge ceremonies) to gather data on their immediate response to the ceremonies and teachings provided. There was a total of two talking circles that were digitally recorded and transcribed. The talking circle were guided by the researcher where questions regarding the women's experiences of the ceremonies were asked.

Gathering Four: Sweat Lodge

Participants were brought to the University of Manitoba fort Gary campus where they were provided with the opportunity to participate in teachings from Ed Azure, Cree Knowledge Keeper about the sweat lodge ceremony. The participants were tasked with taking down and rebuilding the sweat lodge. Participants were provided with the opportunity, if they chose, to enter the sweat lodge and partake in the ceremony. For participants who were not able to, or choose to not enter the sweat lodge, they assisted with keeping the fire burning, or sat by the fire, as this was still recognized as being a part of ceremony. A talking circle was conducted by the researcher (which was audio recorded) that took place directly after the sweat lodge followed by a feast (see Appendix D). Tobacco and feast food and lunch was provided for all participants, and a gift for Ed and his and helpers.

Interview Process

Individual interviews (see Appendix E) were conducted and digitally recorded with participants in a private and confidential space of the participants choosing. They occurred, one week after the ceremony activities had been completed to allow time for participants to further process their experiences. All materials collected during the research have been safeguarded to protect not only participants identity, but their voices and stories. I kept all recorded data on a password protected laptop that only the researcher had access to. Each interview was assigned an alphanumeric label to ensure confidentiality. Participants names are not used, and any other potential identifiable information such as demographics were redacted, omitted, altered or removed prior to the dissemination of research findings, or other materials which may be submitted for publication to ensure confidentiality was maintained. Any paper materials were locked in a filing cabinet in my home office where only the researcher has access.

Research Accountability

After all data was transcribed, participants received a copy of their interview transcripts as requested by email. If revisions were required, contact with the researcher by phone or in-person was available to the participants. The intent of the feedback was to honor the OCAP principles and engage participants during the research process through relationship building (First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2017).

Summary of Findings

Participants were provided with the preliminary research summary one week prior to the closing water ceremony. This was done through email at their request. Participants were then asked to come to the last gathering where they were provided with the opportunity to share their thoughts regarding the final research report.

Gathering Five: Closing Ceremony

Participants were provided with the preliminary report one week prior to gathering five for their review. Participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions, correct any errors, and share their thoughts to ensure that their stories and voices have been captured that honor their experiences. Gifts were given to each participant based on their interests or needs, for example beaded earrings, and copper water cups to use for water ceremonies. Knowledge Keeper, Ed Azure (personal communication, January 9, 2019) shared that within traditional Indigenous customs and protocols it was important that gifts were provided to participants for their time and to honor the work. Gift giving is to remind participants of the time they had with the research and their experiences. It is intended to carry the giver of the gifts into the future, and as a result, the gifts are to be well thought out and based on the needs of the participants (Azure, personal communication, January 9, 2019). Keeping in line with these traditional customs, the

gifts for each participant came to the researcher during this process of relationship building and ceremonies (Azure, personal communication, January 9, 2019). After receiving feedback from participants and giving of their gifts, there was a closing water ceremony to give thanks for their time, commitment, and honor Creator, spirits, ancestors, and all the helpers that guided the research process.

Potential Risks

Emotional and psychological risks may arise while participating in the ceremony. To ensure the safety of all participants, follow up was provided a couple of days after each ceremony to ensure that they were attending to any emotional or psychological issues. The researcher was open to address any possible emotional experiences that may have arisen. Participants were informed after the ceremonies that the researcher would make contact for follow-up where a connection to community resources was provided, or access to an Elder could be arranged. For any trauma symptoms that may have surfaced in the early stages of relationship building, the participants were asked to identify psychosocial and cultural supports in their lives along with providing participants with a list of resources in the community (see Appendix J) they could access. Elders were also available to help with the participants who are experiencing issues arising from ceremonies.

Benefits

Participants received an honorarium of thirty dollars for each day they participated in the research. There were three separate research gatherings for which they were compensated, totaling ninety dollars for each participant. This did not include the opening and closing ceremony, along with the skirt making session due to these being optional activities. Participants who chose to opt-out of the research prior to completion would have received the honorarium

based on the number of gatherings attended where they will receive the thirty dollars at the beginning of gatherings two, three and one-to-one interviews. Benefits also include attaining traditional knowledge from Cree and Ojibwe knowledge keepers shared in this study. It was important to acknowledge with the amount of time and commitment involved in participating in the research by providing the women with an honorarium for their time. Food was provided as this is traditional Indigenous custom while conducting ceremonies or at gatherings. Food was in the form of feast food, as well as snacks due to the length of time spent participating in ceremonies. Bus tickets were provided to ensure that participants did not have to pay for their transportation. these tickets provided them with a means to attend as transportation could potentially be a barrier for women who are on a low income.

Data Analysis

Upon completion of gathering all the data collected from the ceremonies, observation notes, questionnaires, and transcribed interviews I used an inductive approach to help me analyze the data. Thomas (2006) states that an inductive approach is when you use the data to find themes that emerge versus a deductive approach that looks for the information within the data to find similarities that support your research question. Thomas (2006) further adds that the intent of using an inductive approach to analyzing data allows for the researcher to take the raw data and turn it into a format that is summarized in a way that allows for the researcher to find links that emerge that can create a better understanding of the experiences that come out of the data. Thematic Analysis is an inductive method used to code the data to find themes that emerge from the raw data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

First, I became familiar with my data by reading and re-reading the transcripts, and my research notes taken throughout the research regarding my thoughts and impressions of the data.

At this stage of data analysis, I often used sage to smudge and to ground myself to honor the voices of our women. I often prayed, sang traditional songs, and attended sweat lodges to guide me in this process of listening with my heart and mind as I became a part of the women's experiences. I then use an "open code" method where codes were generated based on the information that came out of the data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). As I search for themes that were meaningful or had interesting information connected to my research question, I generate specific codes for particular themes. Having identified the themes, I was able to make sense of the information in a clear way that allowed for me to make connections to the date, any overlapping information, subthemes, and hidden information within the data. I ensured that the themes were then correct before moving on in developing a thematic map where I further defined the themes that emerged from the data and provided me with more meaning as to what they were. The last step in Maguire and Delahunt's (2017), approach to thematic analysis is to "write up" the research into a report for the final draft in my thesis. There were many times during the write up stage of my research where I felt stuck, I used our sacred medicines and sought guidance from our Knowledge Keeper. Throughout the entire research process, I found myself needing to meditate, drum, bead, and go into the sweat lodge to seek the clarity I needed to move forward in a good way

Procedures for Validating Data

Validating thematic analysis took place throughout the whole process from transcribing the raw data, reading the transcriptions, coding, developing themes, reviewing themes, developing thematic mapping, and lastly writing the report (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017). Nowell, et al. (2017) outlines the criteria of establishing trustworthiness in qualitative data that focuses on including 1. credibility, 2. dependability, and 3. confirmability, which is

parallel to the conventional quantitative criteria of validity and reliability. The selection of Indigenous women who experienced sexual exploitation for this research is credible due to statistical data identifying the overrepresentation of Indigenous women and girls who experience sexual exploitation in Canada. This is evident in documents such as Stop Sex with Kids, 2000; "No More" Ending Sex Trafficking in Canada: Report of the National Task Force on Sex Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada (Franssen & O'Brien 2014); Canadian Center for Child Protection (2018); On the Edge Between Two Worlds: Community Narratives on the Vulnerability of Marginalized Indigenous Girls (Bennett, 2016); and Youth Involvement in Prostitution: A literature review and annotated bibliography (Bittle, 2002); Credibility amongst the data was also located through my literature review and other documents.

I utilized member checking as a strategy to enhancing the credibility by connecting with professionals in the community who have a wealth of knowledge around sexual exploitation where they assisted me in guiding the credibility of the data (Nowell et al., 2017). Our Knowledge Keepers and thesis advisory council were an essential aspect for me that helped me interpret the data to ensure that the experiences, transcriptions, and themes that emerge from coding were in line with Indigenous ways of knowing (Kovach, 2009). I also consulted with participants and community stakeholders that assisted me in the validation and interpretations of the themes that emerge within the data. In addition to the process of establishing credibility, I kept an audit of all the raw data gathered. I maintained a research journal of all the raw data and transcriptions. I documented the process of the thematic analysis, interpretations of the data, validity methods, and contact with outside members, Elders and Knowledge Keepers. The research journal was used multiple times during the analytic stages of writing and upon completion of my thesis (Nowell et al., 2017). By keeping an audit trail, I can show the evidence

in my "decision making and any challenges" I had encountered in my data collection, as well as the rationale for my study from the design of the project to the completion of the research process (Nowell et al., 2017). Reflexivity was integral to the audit trail, and through my research journal, I recorded my thoughts and how they emerged from internal and external dialogue (Nowell et al., 2017). Keeping a research journal allowed me to document my experiences as an Indigenous researcher, and my connection to ceremony, elders and Knowledge Keepers who guided me through this process. There may be findings from this research that do not correspond to a western concept of validity because Indigenous ways of knowing do not always conform to western ways of knowing. However, using the thematic analysis steps, I was able to capture data that attempted to include the spirit.

In my last steps involved in data analysis, I used confirmability to help interpret the findings and draw on the conclusions made through the processes of credibility, transferability, and dependability (Nowell et al., 2017). I found it important to document the process in which confirmed themes emerged from the data and to show in a systematic way the steps I used throughout the process that made the data credible. Within Indigenous research methodologies, it was important to me as an Indigenous researcher to check in with the participants continually, and our Knowledge Keepers to ensure that the stories shared throughout the study represented their voices (Kovach, 2009). Kovach (2009) stated that truth is found within one's story, being the storyteller, and telling the stories of others, "the truths of the stories are held within the life context of the storyteller. While another storyteller may share similar experiences, truth cannot be abstracted from the life."

Under the principles of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP) (First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2017), the data I collected from the research is owned

by all the participants I am only the steward of their data. Each participant received a copy of their transcript as it is their right to have access to their stories. The intent for giving the participants their transcripts was to provide them with opportunities to ensure that any corrections required were done in a collective manner that was respectful. Throughout the process of data analysis, I often consult with participants to ensure that the reflection of their experience was done in a way that honored their stories and knowledge. The intent with this approach was to keep the data valid. This approach was particularly important because Indigenous people have a history of being researched in a manner that did not benefit them, was done without their approval, and with no opportunity to have a meaningful role in the conduct of the research or the data analysis (First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2017).

Ethical Considerations

Protocol around ceremonies differ from community to community; however, I worked with Ed Azure, our Cree Knowledge Keeper, his teachings and Indigenous protocols guided me. I had many discussions with each participant before beginning the study about their safety needs during the research process. Researching Indigenous people entails a unique set of principles, guidelines, and protocols that are in place to ensure that they are not ethically mistreated or exploited due to historical unethical research practice that has taken place (Kovach, 2009). The Tri Council Policy Statement (TCPS) (1998) outlines protocols when conducting research on Indigenous people that are guided by three principles "Respect for Persons, Concern for Welfare, and Justice."

Respect for Persons

TCPS (1998) emphasizes the free and ongoing consent of the participants so that if they choose to opt-out of the research at any point there are no negative consequence. Consent forms

were provided to participants in writing along with meeting in-person to explain further what consent was, the importance of a free will to participate, and the rights around being able to withdrawal from this research at any time (TCPS, 1998; First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2017). Out of the initial 15 participants, 5 chose to leave the research, and as such, all their data, consent forms, and survey questionnaires were destroyed. For the participants who left the research, none of their information was used in this study. To ensure that participation was voluntary, I developed a project description (Flyer) that provided details of the research in great detail. Potential participants contacted me through the information on the flyer through telephone or email. This was done to ensure that their participation was self-initiated, and no pressure was exerted upon them.

Respect for persons was also taken into consideration given that there are Indigenous protocols in place that are meant to protect Indigenous knowledge, participants, and the natural world that surpass ethical considerations (TCPS, 1998). Kovach (2009), explains the importance of having Indigenous research be guided by an Advisory committee, or Tribal system to ensure ethical misconduct is avoided. I was completely transparent with my thesis advisors that helped guide my research to protect the participants and also to hold me accountable not to misuse the knowledge attained and to honor the interconnectedness we have to "all my relations" (TCPS, 1998). The traditional knowledge and new information attained through the course of my research belongs to my participants, Elders, and community. Therefore, I had the responsibility to take care of this knowledge and treat it with respect (TCPS, 1998).

OCAP (First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2017), states that all data gathered is to be owned by the participants, they are required to assist in guiding the process, validating transcripts so that the information collected is reflective of their truth. The research is with the

people, for the people, and requires this partnership to be integral to this process (Kovach, 2009). I provided multiple opportunities to do "member check-ins" and invite the participants to meet on an ongoing basis throughout the data analysis processes, and completion of the research. I understood this research has the purpose of helping the community and of giving back in a meaningful way; therefore, this research belongs to our people and is intended to be used to help the women in this study and the community (Kovach, 2009; First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2017). Kovach (2009) adds to this by explaining we are required to honor and provide guardianship over Indigenous knowledge and that working with Elders, and the advisory committee will provide the guidance I will require to ensure that I am protecting and respecting not only the principles under OCAP (First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2017).

Working with Elders and Knowledge Keepers also required ethical considerations. It was my responsibility to be transparent with my Knowledge Keeper about the research I conducted, the purpose, and how I planned on using the knowledge I gained to give back and help the community. Kovach (2009), supports this aspect to protect sacred knowledge and to provide our Elders the opportunity to share things that would be okay, versus using sacred knowledge that will not be honored or diminished through Western ethical procedures. My advisory committee provided the same support by offering me insight and guidance around ensuring the sacredness of Indigenous knowledge is held in the highest form of respect. It was important for me to consider how I was to take care of this knowledge shared and to protect it in a way that provides guardianship to "All my relations" (Kovach, 2009).

Concern for Welfare

Concern for welfare is understood best when looking at the Medicine Wheel. While conducting my research, there was a responsibility to ensure that no harm was caused to the physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental aspects of the participants. (TCPS, 1998). The application process involved screening participants in a non-invasive way of determining if they were open to participating in Indigenous teachings and ceremonies. Ethically, it was understood that due to the vulnerabilities of the participants, my responsibility was to minimize the risk of harm that they may be exposed to while attending ceremonies. It was essential for me to keep them safe during the research process, and if at any time they needed to leave, it would have been done in a respectful way. To help mitigate potential risk regarding trauma resurfacing, in the beginning, stage of the research participants was asked to identify supports in their lives. I also provide participants with a list of resources in the community they could access (see Appendix F). Elders were also available to help with the participants who were experiencing trauma. However, out of the ten women in this research, none one of them requested further supports with an Elder, and contact was made regularly by me to check-in and ensured they had what they needed.

Concern for welfare emphasizes that working with vulnerable populations; care is required to ensure their overall wellbeing (TCPS, 1998). During the orientation stage, prior to signing consent forms, I explained to the participants of the potential risks around trauma and flashbacks. During this process, participants were provided with the choice to participate based on being informed of all potential risks, provided with an outline of the protocols and procedures, and given the agenda, the informed decision was made by all initial fifteen participants to be part of this study.

Other Ethical Considerations

Another ethical consideration that was important for me as an Indigenous researcher was respect for the land. I see Mother Earth the same way I see people. She is as alive as I am. While going through this research process, I had maintained this respect and reciprocity with her. I did not abuse the land, disrespect her, or cause harm while we participated in the ceremonies. To honor Mother Earth for her gifts, she gave to us to do the healing work that took place in this research; I often put down tobacco to thank her, and to honor what she has given of herself for us. It is important to include "Mother Earth" within the ethical considerations, she must not be forgotten. It was hard to write about how I kept ethical considerations as it pertains to the Creator, my Ancestors, and the spirit guides that walk with me. To put into words something that protects this is difficult when I feel that this whole process has been based on love and kindness for all our ancestors and the love that I have for Creator. It is part of who I am as an Indigenous person and cannot be separated within this research experience. What I can share is that tobacco was offered, feasting took place (spirit plates) and being in prayer for thanks and guidance grounded me in this research.

Chapter 4 - Findings Part I

The participants shared information related to their experiences in the sex industry, age of entry, how they were recruited, substance use, and identified risk factors pertaining to colonization. The information was attained through the one-to-one interviews after the completion of the gatherings.

Participant Characteristics and Experiences

The ten women who participated in the study ranged in age from 21-48 years of age (Table 1). All the women identified as having experienced sexual exploitation in the sex industry as young as 13 with one entering fully at the age of 22 (Table 2). Three of the women identified as either recently exiting the sex industry in the last five months, with the other two still actively involved. Three of the women exited within the last six years, while the remaining two were within fifteen years. Addictions appeared to play a significant role in eight of the women with substance use being their starting point into the sex industry.

Table 2:

Participant Demographics

Variable	Number
Age	
20-29	1
30-39	7
40-49	2
Indigenous Ancestry	
Metis	5
First Nations	5
Gender	
Female	9
Transgender Female	1

Note. These figures are based solely upon information given by the study participants.

Table 3:*Participant*

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Number</i>
Age when sexual exploitation occurred	
13 years	4
14 years	1
16 years	3
21 years	1
Number of women involvements in the sex industry	
Sexual exploitation	
Active	2
Exited	8
Exited in the last:	
6 months	3
6 months to 6 years	3
7 to 16 years	2
Recruitment	
Family	1
Peers	6
Perpetrators/Exploiters	3
Substance Use	
prior to entry	8
developed during SE	2
Intergenerational SE	4

One woman shared her first experience of recruitment and how illicit drugs played a considerable role in this,

...I was 16. I remember, I was into drugs. I was into cocaine at the time. Remember meeting up with this guy, and I always wanted to smoke, like huff. Like, how crack felt...he gave me a blast of it. I took a hit and I wanted more. He was like, "Oh, do you want more?" I was like, "Yeah." He's like, "Okay, let's go for a walk." So, I went for a walk. So, I went for a walk with him. He was like, "Stand down here." I remember where it was...He told me to stand there and wait for a vehicle to come by and stop. (A9)

Another woman shared how using drugs with peers developed her addiction to crack cocaine and the connection it had to sexual exploitation,

We had girls coming over, right. I was watching them and seeing what they were doing. They would offer me to get high. I would. Then once they left, it was gone. Well, now I wanted more. One day, I just was like, "Hey, take me with you." One of the girls did. That was it. Game over. It was just too easy. (A18)

The other two participants who did not develop addictions before being involved in the sex industry, However, developed addictions to cope with the trauma of their experiences,

At that time, it was just specifically for money...for things that I wanted as a teenager. It wasn't until later when it became too much, the knowledge of what I was doing, that I had to start to cover it up with something and it started with alcohol, and then quickly fell into drugs. And, those were introduced to me by other girls that were working, but those girls, I don't think they were trying to harm me. I think they were trying to help me build some kind of wall so I could continue working and doing what I needed to do without dying inside. (A11)

While she explained how addiction to money came first and substances afterward, the other woman explained that despite not using drugs while being involved in the sex industry, her addiction to alcohol developed after she exited,

I never worked to feed that addiction but I did...I no longer had my son in my care so I would go work. I worked as an escort and in massage parlors. I would leave work and I'd go drink. I'd work, work my ass off and then I'd go drink it all away. I have nothing to show for all of those years. Nothing. I have beautiful kids but it was yeah, I drank it all away. (A1)

When looking at the introduction of how the women became exposed to the sex industry, six identified that peers had an influence. One woman shared,

It was through, I might probably say a peer, who I had a crush on her brother. Her brother's girlfriend is a working girl. And so my friend took me specifically to Selkirk at McGregor. And that's the first time I ever jumped in a car with an older man. (A14)

Another participant shared how she was coping with her circumstances at home that made her vulnerable to peers influence on entering the sex industry,

Yeah. Oh, I could not stand to live with my mom because she drank a lot, and there was no food...she never bought me clothes, and that's another reason why I got into sex trade because she never...provided those things for me. And then it was so easy. My friends were like, "Oh, if you do this..." They just make it sound all nice. And then, yeah, I was just like, "Oh, I just felt so ugly and gross." I just felt so ashamed of myself because I wasn't brought up that way.... only did it when I absolutely had to. (A14)

Another woman shared that she learned about what to do by watching her friends, and how this opened the door to her becoming involved in the sex industry,

I had a friend that was out there and she would take me along with her so then I would... at first it started like I was watching her, I would go along with her when she would get picked up, I would go along with her...The guy asked if he could touch me and he would pay more so that was the first time it ever happened. Then after that it was just, it was like a norm, it was always a norm and it started that but that's how it started. (A5)

Although peers had a considerable influence on the women's introduction into the sex industry, the other three women shared how perpetrators exploited their vulnerabilities. One woman explained how being in the care of Child and Family Services created this vulnerability for her,

I was 16, and I had moved out on my own on independent living with CFS...The requirements for me to move out is I had to take a money management course and that was it. Nobody checked on me. I went every month to pick up my check from the CFS office, and that was it. I didn't have no worker or support worker watching out for me or coming to check on me for my own well-being or if I had food in my fridge or if my bills were paid...So I basically got an apartment and left at 16...it was there in that apartment building that I met a black man that bought me and all my friends alcohol but we had to come down to his apartment to get it. And asked us all if we wanted a hoot from the little crack pipe. We all said no, but because I lived in that apartment, because I was alone and vulnerable, I eventually did it. I did it for six months. And that's when the questions came up to work on the street. (A4)

Another woman shared how a cab driver targeted her, and this became the entry point for her to start charging men for sex acts at the age of 13:

It was a cab driver. I was stuck somewhere, and I was walking a far way home, and a cab driver picked me up and told me that if you do this for me, because he knew I had no money. I told him I had no money. He said, "That's okay, I'll still give you a ride," and when I got to where I was going. I was going to leave, and he was like, "Well, I'll give you this amount of money if you do this for me." And yeah, I did. I needed the money. (A11)

Others shared how intergenerational sexual exploitation was part of their upbringing and how this exposure affected them at young ages. One woman shared,

...it was because my auntie is the one who actually taught ... Well, tried to teach me, I was like, "I'm not having it." But she tried to teach me and my sister at a young age, my

sister was 13, I was 14. She was a street worker and I don't know if my mom knew this or not, but my mom would let us go with my auntie places. And so my auntie would take us to her Johns places, and just teach us stuff about how you can be a worker, what you have to do, how to dress, how to put on makeup, how to be sexual and stuff like that, and I was like, "No." But my sister, she went full force, she started smoking crack when she was 13 years old, she started working the street when she was 13. (A2)

Two of the participants, who happen to be sisters, both shared how their mother's involvement in the sex industry was around them before they could make sense of what was happening for them. One of the sisters shared,

See, I don't really know because I can't really remember what age it was when my mom started telling us exactly what it is she was doing, and who these guys were and stuff. So I would say that's where the introduction would come in play, before we started knowing about it more. (A3)

Being raised in an environment where sexual exploitation and illicit drug use can contribute to youth being vulnerable to sexual exploitation. One woman explained being surrounded by this at a young age, perpetuated her own experiences as a youth,

...I had grown up seeing my mother do it and then that was introduced to me, I thought that was what we did...Because I grew up seeing my mom doing drugs, I thought it was okay. I was doing what I'm supposed to do. What I'm doing what is right, there is no wrong here...You don't know who to trust. You don't know what's right from wrong. Especially when you've been exposed to drugs and alcohol and sexual exploitation for your whole life. (A4)

Despite the women sharing how intergenerational sexual exploitation at a young age exposed them to be vulnerable to being sexually exploited in their youth, it was clear that regardless of the circumstances within their families, their love for them still provided them a sense of belonging, understanding, and love.

She [referring to her auntie] was like my mom throughout the years and so, yeah, I guess being around her wasn't the best thing, but she was always there for me when I needed her. (A2)

Belonging and Identity

Belonging is identified amongst the women, whether directly or indirectly, they all shared the importance of how belonging could prevent sexual exploitation from ever taking place. They attributed the lack of belonging created a void in which the perpetrators filled. One participant explained that despite growing up within a two-parent home, that sense of belonging was not present, and as a result, was located amongst unhealthy peers and those who sexually exploited her from age 17 to 21 years old.

My per group. The family unit. Feeling, ah, you know what, here's where that doesn't belong stuff come in. Not feeling like I had a space. You have a two-parent family where one parent is absent the majority of time and everything is left to the other parent to handle and manage. With two kids. Sexual abuse in the home. Maybe not having proper supervision because the parent that was left to raise us the majority of the time, worked hard but was a very disengaged parent. Now you have this young person who's still trying to figure herself out, who has nowhere, doesn't belong anywhere, has no base. Even though there's a base that's there, there is no base. (A1)

The sense of belonging is even harder to find when children and youth are in the care of Child and Family Service where multiple placements create a disconnection to family and a sense of belonging. One participant explained how being in multiple placements in Child and Family Services influenced her sense of belonging,

Well, I grew up in over 44 homes. I actually stopped counting when I was 16...I stopped counting at 16. I guess that ... After being in the trade for a while, I've been introduced and I kind of was searching for affection as well. Yeah. Like with the regulars, having that affection. Being in multiple homes, I didn't really get that affection, so I learned to get affection from the wrong ways that felt right. (A9)

Knowing who you are and where you come from as an Indigenous person is a crucial aspect not only around developing identity, it creates a space for belonging within the community. One participant explained how a lack of culture and sense of belonging in her community attributed to her vulnerabilities in being sexually exploited,

All I know is that I would have more healing. And I don't think I would have followed that way, that way of living like selling my body and for sex...I don't know, if I knew who I was, where I came from, I don't think that I would've felt so broken and wanting to be wanted and belong, do you know what I mean? I feel like I was doing that to be wanted and to feel like I belonged somewhere with someone...(A2)

Internal and external factors that contribute to the vulnerability of the women involved in this study ranged from Child and Family Services, peer pressure or peer recruitment, addictions, perpetrators targeting the women at a young age, to internal factors around belonging, identity, disconnection from family and intergenerational sexual exploitation. Knowing who you are and where you come from as an Indigenous woman can potentially offer protective factors that are

embedded in traditional ceremonies and act as a deterrent from the vulnerabilities the women participants of this study experienced. When asked if the women had access to traditional Indigenous teachings and ceremonies as a child, more than half of the women identified that this was not present in their lives, with the remainder of the women indicating that at some point there was ceremonies or traditional objects they were around for a brief time.

One woman explained further,

I didn't have the chance to grow up with my family because I grew up in the CFS system.

I didn't really know about if my family members have participated in any Indigenous cultural traditions. That's a no. (A9)

While CFS had a part in severing the connection to her culture, another woman also spoke about this disconnection; However, it is in the context of her family line losing access to who they were as Indigenous people,

My grandma's lost, my granny's lost, I'm pretty sure we were... I don't know, she looked like a Cree lady...But my grandpa, I don't know? His last name, because we were at the award show on Friday and this lady her last name there was like, "Hey, they might be my cousin." But I want to know, like where did he come from? because...my mom's pretty freaking brown. Where does that come from? Are you guys from a reserve somewhere?

(A3)

For some of the other women, they had exposure to Indigenous images or access to ceremonies as a child growing up; however, this connection was either kept from them or severed. One woman shared,

It was considered taboo. I know that there was ceremonies going on, but they were very hidden. They were very private. They were very hidden and most of us kids were not

exposed to them. I didn't start knowing about these things until I was in my mid-teens.

(A11)

This woman, in particular, was the eldest of the ladies who participated in this study, her perspective on why ceremonies were obscure is consistent with the timeline where ceremonies were still illegal under the Criminal Code of Canada. The law prevented practicing Indigenous ceremonies, and as a result, she is part of the generation of children that we're prevented from ceremonies. Another woman did not grow up with access to ceremonies; however, images of traditional items were in the home, but the meaning and context behind the sacred item was missing,

The only ceremony that I grew up was [seeing] a [eagle] feather... I'd never got the teaching of a feather. My mother always had a feather. She had traditional paintings or pictures on the wall. (A13)

Being exposed to traditional items such as the eagle feather is a collective experience shared by the women in this study, they understood that it was meaningful, however gaps in the teachings around the sacredness of such items, and the creation stories connected to them create a void that hampered their understanding of who they are, and where they belong. Another participant grew up along the pow wow trail; however, this access to culture was severed,

Yeah. My uncle he was a world-famous hoop dancer. I would go to ceremonies, like powwows. But we weren't really into the smudging and stuff like that...at home but outside of my home when I went to see my other side of the family...we would probably do the smudging and stuff. But it was basically just pow wows that I got into growing up. Probably like seven, eight, nine. And then my uncle started to get into addictions and that fell apart. (A5)

The severing of culture and traditional teachings and ceremonies is a common thread that connects the women in this study. Every single woman experienced some form of disconnection to the land, Creator, Mother Earth, and the spirit world. This disconnection was replaced by religion for a majority of the women in this study, whether it was Protestant, Roman Catholic, or being a Jehovah's Witness. For some of the women, they never connected to religion, and for others, there was an ongoing internal conflict identified by participants in this study. One woman shared her understanding of what this disconnection was for her

So, I had always grew up believing in God, and so I asked God a couple times to guide me, to give me direction. And I never once felt like I had that guidance from God. And it wasn't until I spoke to the Creator and Mother Earth that I saw that path...I can feel a presence of my ancestors with me. I never felt that with God. There is nothing.

Absolutely nothing. (A4)

Despite growing up with religion, she came to a place in her own life where she opened the door to create a better understanding of what it means to be an Indigenous woman through access to ceremonies and traditional teachings. For her, she has been on her healing journey for several years and has spent time creating an understanding of the difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of knowing. Although some women shared this same perspective, other women also expressed how religion and learning about ceremony was an essential part of their lives. One woman shared,

My grandmother who was in residential school didn't ... She hated the whole church Christian thing, so we were never around that. She wanted all of us to be Jehovah's Witnesses, so my mom followed that with my grandmother and so did my aunties and most of my grandmother's brothers and sisters too. So, that's why I feel like I'm out of

place because I'm the only one that is Christian and that is trying to learn about my traditional ways and my culture...Just with God I feel ... Because with AA, they say a higher power, right, God gives me hope...something to believe in and to have faith that things will get better. And then the cultural part is just part of who I am...having both of them is like having my cake and eating it too. And I don't care what other people would say, it's as long as I'm healing, and I feel comfortable with that (A2)

Having respect for both non-Indigenous religion and Indigenous teachings and ceremonies was a theme that surfaced amongst the women that grew up with Western religions. Despite indicating that there was a place for both in their healing journeys, all of the women who shared this perspective also indicated that one spoke to them more than the other, one woman shared,

I love traditional ways. I think it's more of connection with the land and nature and...the animals...And then...the other way is just...the Bible...I just felt...more of a connection with the traditional ways. (A14)

What is clear with all the women is that the connection to the land and nature around them spoke to their spirits, and despite Western religious beliefs, their connection to culture and what this means to them in their journeys helped them understand who they are as Indigenous women. It sparked their curiosity and their wanting to create a more in-depth understanding of Indigenous teachings. One woman right from the very beginning of this research expressed openly that she believed in God and that Indigenous ceremonies created a conflict within her beliefs. However, despite her conflicts around her faith, her commitment to participate throughout this study was evident.

...because I have different views on certain things and disagreements...I was scared because I didn't know what I was going to get myself into, but at the same time, I was curious. To be honest, I still have the same feeling about it (referring to Indigenous teachings and ceremonies). At first, when I came in, I participated in it, but I feel like I'm curious about it. I feel like ... I don't know if it's important or ... I'm just curious about it, to know more.

Throughout the study, this woman expressed her opinions and asked questions that were supported by other women in this study. As she takes the journey of creating a space for learning more about who she is as an Indigenous woman, curiosity sparked this process for her. In social work practice, as more Indigenous workers promote ceremonies and teachings as part of the healing process, it is crucial to be mindful that just because a person is Indigenous, one should not assume they are automatically going to be open to this way of healing. Being mindful, gentle and allowing the individual to explore, ask questions and even to challenge some of their thought process around what fits for them is just as valuable as accessing ceremonies and receiving new teachings about their culture. The key is to allow a person to be present and create an environment of learning so that they can choose what fits for them. This patience, gentleness, and understanding are Indigenous perspectives that honor the healing of individuals regardless of one's religious faith.

Colonization

Sexual exploitation of Indigenous women did not just happen by chance, the root of the problem that perpetuates sexual exploitation, links back to the colonization of Indigenous women in Canada. For the women in this study, whether they understood this connection or not, they were all affected by this. The internal and external factors, as mentioned above created a level of

vulnerability for the women; however, all these factors are a result of colonizers targeting Indigenous women to not only disenfranchise their existence but to break down the very fabric of their culture and traditional knowledge. One of the women shared her thoughts around colonization that summed up everything:

I would say that 90% of the women that I work with were visibly aboriginal women...and from their stories that I've been told, had ended up there because they were seen as worthless. They had been abused. They see themselves as worthless. They grew up in their families ridden with alcohol and drugs. They were sexually exploited from a young age, and then they had nowhere else to go because they were worthless. Nobody ever taught them their worth. Nobody ever taught them how powerful or strong they really were, and I think that goes back right to the beginning when colonization started, how we were in a situation of power. Our voices mattered. We were leaders and then when colonization came here, we were taught that we were just cattle, we were property. We were to be owned. We were to be dominated. Our ideas didn't matter, and it carried through. It carried through all these generations because what's a woman good for? And, that idea was there. There's sex, child rearing. Those were mostly ideas from the 1500's. They're not ours. Those are from across the ocean. Women were cattle and that's not how it's supposed to be. (A11)

When looking at the destruction left in the wake of colonization, the women in this study are just a few of the thousands of Indigenous women subjected to this form of gender-based violence. It was expressed that ceremony and traditional Indigenous teachings along with an understanding of women's traditional roles and their value located within the tribes may well serve as protective factors that could prevent sexual exploitation from occurring. When the

women in this study were asked if they felt that access to ceremonies as a child could have potentially prevented them from being sexually exploited, all the women responded yes except one that did not know. Their responses ranged from the importance of ceremony, connection to Mother Earth, traditional teachings, to a sense of community and belonging. One woman shared,

...I wasn't able to be connected to my culture and my people, and just the sense that probably, I would have...had a different path I think. Because we would have the Creator and mother earth and the land as guidance and to the different directions. And learning about this path and teachings and that alone right there would make a difference. And understanding what love, honesty, humility is all about is probably would have sent me in a different direction and path. (A4)

While the women in this study identified that ceremony and teachings would have helped to prevent sexual exploitation, another woman expressed that the community was equally as important,

My thoughts are that it does take a village to raise a child and having access to those pieces, the ceremony and things like that and pow-wow and, that's a community. That's a whole community. I think that those pieces, that belonging piece, that belonging piece is huge when we're looking at exploitation. Just belonging to something. Because we will find where we fit no matter what that looks like and no matter at what cost because that sense of village and community is so strong. I believe that yes, if I had ceremony, if I had people to belong to, that the likelihood of me being so vulnerable at 13, it probably wouldn't have happened because my community would have been so strong...(A1)

Access to Indigenous knowledge, and ceremonies was important to all the women, they were able to draw on their personal experiences and make connections in their lives identifying

how lack of culture, and access to ceremonies was missing from their family line. Even for some of the women that had more access to traditional knowledge, this was disrupted at some point. When looking at the why and how the women were vulnerable to sexual exploitation, colonization sits at the epi center of their experiences. Access to ceremony was identified as a piece that was missing for them in their youth and expressed how important this would have been in reducing their vulnerability.

Chapter 5 - Findings Part II

The participants shared experiences related to making the ribbon skirt where they identified the importance of helping one another, developing relationships with the other women, and connections to reclaiming their Indigeneity with the ribbon skirts. These narratives were shared through the one-to-one interviews attained after the completion of the gatherings.

Ribbon Skirt Sewing Gathering

The intent of gathering the participants to learn to sew a ribbon skirt focused on relationships, identity, and reclamation of who they are as Indigenous women. The women received Ojibwe teachings on how the ribbon skirts, when worn, connect us to Creator and the spirit world. When Indigenous women walk in the ribbon skirts, we are recognized by Creator, Mother Earth, and the spirit world for the work we do as women and our essential roles as life-givers. Depending on the teachings of one's tribe, ribbon skirts embellished with colors received in ceremonies connects a person to their spirit name and sacred colors. However, some of the women in this study did not have their spirit names or colors; they were asked to pick fabric and colors that have meaning to them. It is essential to acknowledge that the teachings of the ribbon skirt vary from nation to nation and these differences are all regarded as true and valid. This information was shared with the women throughout the day the ribbon skirt making took place (S. Copenace, personal communication, 2019).

Helping hands. Being gifted a ribbon skirt is a beautiful gesture; it creates meaning not only for the person receiving the gift, but the love placed into making the ribbon skirt is shared. Out of the nine women who participated in the making of the ribbon skirt, only two of the women had experience in sewing and making skirts. As the facilitator on this day, I needed to create a space at Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, Wi Che Win located at 800 Selkirk Avenue, for

the women that was orderly; however, this was not the situation. It was chaotic and a little disorganized. One of the women from the study offered to help set up the sewing machines and assist the other woman in making their ribbon skirts, but when declined, her response was a gentle reminder.

...we are all here to help one another, it is in this way of helping we get to develop closer bonds and relationships with one another. You don't have to carry the load by yourself, we carry enough already. (A11)

The help offered by her was received well by all the women that were present that day. One woman, in particular, shared her perspective,

I looked for the helper. I did! I looked for the helper in the bunch and I allowed her to help me where I needed it, where I thought I wasn't too smart and I swallowed my ego a little. I don't know everything. (A1)

As Indigenous women, gatherings like this encourages a sense of belonging, and receiving help is part of the process. Healing does not have to take place in isolation, nor does it require one to actively talk about their experiences in order for healing to be nurtured. For the helper in the group who shared her kind words and gentle nature, this was what she shared,

So for me, being able to be in a group of women, who most of them had never made a ribbon skirt, and being able to help them and show them how to load the machines and stuff, it almost felt like this was my clique. This was my clique. I finally have a clique...being that I was older than everybody else, I was able to take that initiative to be...that person in that position. (A11)

Asking for help and being in a position to provide help can be hard for many women to receive regardless of trauma presenting itself in one's life or not. For women living in a

patriarchal society, the expectations are that they carry that load alone and that asking for help is a form of weakness or makes them less than for needing help. However, within Indigenous communities, giving back and helping others in the slightest of ways is viewed as an honor and how the transmission of knowledge passes from generation to generation. One woman shared,

...it was good. When it was completed even with the help...It felt really good. I believe now I can go and show somebody else how to make one. Even though I wasn't there doing all the hard work, I'm very observant...it felt really good to have my own or make my own first ribbon skirt. (A5)

Helping one another out is an intrinsic value within Indigenous communities, and despite colonization, women helping other women is within their spirit and being. This helping nature comes back to life and becomes so natural in gatherings such as the ribbon skirt. Making the connection to this deeper meaning found in relationships when working with Indigenous women is vital, it is more than just helping one another, it is about natural relationships that are fundamental to the healing process.

Relationships. The day of the ribbon skirt making was the second time the women gathered as a group. Indigenous gatherings create the space for connectedness to take place. Every one of the women in this study brought enthusiasm into the space, and it was here where one could see that the ribbon skirt making took on its form. Everyone was proud of their ribbon skirts, but more so, the majority felt the connection to one another, and the importance of the relationships established amongst them. Gatherings such as this also promote mental wellbeing. Instead of being isolated and alone with one's thoughts. Their feelings can be translated into the act of doing and placed into the very fabric and stitches within the ribbons and thread used to create their skirts. One woman shared,

The ribbon skirt was... It was nice. I felt the connection with the group after making that. And to myself ...It's almost like I was taking care of my health or something. (A14)

For another woman, she was not able to make it to the ribbon skirt gathering, however during the one-to-one interview she explained how not being with the women in this study made her feel,

"Oh my God, everybody's sitting there in a sisterhood. Connecting, talking, probably wondering like, 'What design should I use?' Like, 'what are you going to use?'" Actually, being polite what kind of stuff is going to go here? What kind of stuff is going to go there? Not having a chaotic space, getting to know each other. This is the big thing. Getting to know so many different personalities, so much stronger people on a different level...rather than going to a bar and fighting or fighting over a man...I was like, "I'm missing a connecting point with my Indigenous sisters and I've craved this." I wanted the skirts. But there's more to than just the skirt and what it looks like. It was more about that [relationships] for me.

As relationships developed for the women in this activity, the relationship to their community and access to ceremonies or other gatherings also took form within them. There was a spark of hope that translated in their stories as the women shared their visions of future gatherings because they had a ribbon skirt that made them feel empowered to do more and want more connections and relationships. One woman shared,

...I guess, what colors you pick, what pattern, how you want to make it, being creative.

And then I'm like, "Ooh, I've got my own skirt to go with my sweat with, or I can go to a pow-wow with it on." And I could start drumming...I want to start a drum group. Just

being in this like little program that we have here, it's opened up so much for me and I want to do more with my culture and learning, so I'm glad I came here, I'm so glad. (A2)

Another woman also shared how proud she was to wear her ribbon skirt to a gathering shortly after it was made,

It's pretty important. Me and my daughter went to go do that the Mother's Day march. I took it with me. I didn't wear it on the march but as soon as we got around that circle, I put it on. So it's pretty important to me to have that for those kind of things to do now. It makes me feel more part of the groups, if that's what you mean? I don't know. I know skirts are big part of traditional stuff in ceremonies, so it feels really good to have one of my own, and I don't have to rummage through a big pile of craft skirts to wear. I've got my own now. (A3)

The women actively indicated that owning a ribbon skirt, centers them in their community and encourages those relationships to be developed and the confidence to access more ceremonies. The ribbon skirt made this connection for the women genuinely. It is necessary to encourage the connection to community and to build on the natural gifts that the community has in the healing for Indigenous women who are exiting from the sex industry because this builds social capital. Because of colonization and our patriarchal society's role in dismantling the fabric of traditional Indigenous communal living, the women in this study experienced this fragmentation. By creating a sense of community for the women through the ribbon skirt teachings and gathering, it opens up further opportunities for them. The relationships they have made with one another, as well as the relationships they made to their community to continue to seek out ceremonies and gatherings are all positioned in healthy and positive connections. The very act of connecting and building relationships that allow Indigenous women to reclaim who

they are is one of the many ways that social work can be decolonizing its practice. It is an act of healing and is evident in reclaiming their indigeneity and their integral roles in community, family, and within one's self.

Reclaiming Indigeneity. The making of a ribbon skirt is not just about sewing pieces of fabric and ribbon together. The ribbon skirt is a symbol of reclaiming one's indigeneity and creating awareness of the effect's colonization has had on Indigenous women. One woman shared,

We are segregated, and it's really stupid, and it's unnecessary anymore. Doesn't matter, there's no way to measure blood quantum...Colonization...It's a tool to keep us separate, to keep us bickering...so that we're not looking at the real stuff.

The ribbon skirt is about reclamation, reviving individual sense of their cultural rights within the individual; it is a symbol of being a survivor of cultural genocide. One woman shared, ...I was actually ashamed growing up because of the stigma Indigenous people have on them. Wearing that ribbon skirt now has made me more proud to be an Indigenous woman. I wear it with pride. And I think that it gives you a sense of connection to culture. So when I go out, if I were to wear it out to any type of events or something and somebody sees a person, any person wearing a ribbon skirt you know that they are Indigenous or connected to the Indigenous culture. There is no shame in that to wear that with pride. (A4)

Reclamation is healing, understanding the historical ramifications that colonization has had on Indigenous women, and their identity can offer a new perspective that is empowering. The ribbon skirt is symbolic of the reclamation of self and securing a sense of power within. One woman shared,

As I'm learning, I'm beginning to see my own connections to the land and the sacredness of a women and why we wear the skirt. Being able to make a skirt, wear it, has been an honor to be able to celebrate my identity, to be able to honor my ancestors, to be able to connect me to my own roots. That's a beautiful thing. That's a beautiful thing. It's a tree that's being planted. It's a seed that's taking root in a person. There is no feeling like that in the world... (A1)

For women who are still struggling with addictions and sexual exploitation, the ribbon skirt holds no shame when worn. Regardless of where a person is in their healing, it can ignite the spirit reminding them even for a moment they are a part of something so unique and meaningful. One's spirit has an opportunity to shine and be reminded of the sacredness of their being. Making a ribbon skirt creates a legacy of hope and love for Indigenous women who are looking for answers and ways to move forward and find the meaning of who they are as Indigenous women. One woman shared,

It felt good...It makes me feel proud. I was sitting in my bed, every time I look at it [her ribbon skirt], I just kind of smile. I'm like, "I made that." I've been to sweat before. It was always like, "Hey, you got an extra skirt?" Or someone's bringing a basket of extra skirts. It's not mine. That's mine. I get to claim that. I get to wear it and say, "That's mine. I made that." It's a proud feeling that I got from making that ribbon skirt...(A18)

There was also another experience some women had with the ribbon skirt making activity. Despite being an Indigenous woman, the connection to the ribbon skirt may not be present as it is for others. Colonization shifted the mindset of Indigenous women and for some creates a lack of connection to wearing one. One woman shared her feelings about that day

To be honest...It just made me feel like I was wearing a skirt. I don't know if that made me feel anything... I guess I didn't really think anything to it...I heard a teaching about it from a woman, the reason why women wear skirts. Because that's their way of connecting with their Mother Earth or something. That's one thing that I heard about that. To be honest...I didn't feel not connected ... I didn't really think of anything to it. (A9)

Despite not feeling connected to the ribbon skirt, this woman spoke her truth. The day the ribbon skirt making took place, she was not able to finish hers, due to not feeling well. For the other women in the group that understood the difficulties she experienced being a part of this study, instead of disconnecting from her, they supported her further. For example, the woman who identified as the helper took her skirt back home and finished it. When the Full Moon ceremony took place, she gifted the skirt back to her. The skirt had a turtle where its little feet were left walking. When asked if she recalled what the meaning behind the turtle was, her response was as follows,

I remember what she said to me, the reason why she put that on, because I'm able to speak my truth. It spoke to me, yeah. It made sense, why she put that on there. (A9)

For this woman to feel supported in speaking her truth around being confused about the cultural components in this study is an important aspect of healing. She was supported and cared for by the other women. Most of the women in this study that had previous experience with Indigenous teachings and ceremonies, understood the confusion and the conflict that can come from learning more about Indigenous ways of being and knowing. In social work practice, this is teaching all on its own, being kind, and gentle and not just assuming a person who is Indigenous, will automatically connect to traditional ways. It takes time, and the healing that will take place

needs to come at the pace of the person. Healing cannot be structured in a way that uses outcomes as the priority.

Summary. Ribbon skirts are a recent expression of reclaiming one's identity. It is a beautiful and colorful way of expressing who a person is through their clan, spirit names, and spirit helpers. The women designed their ribbon skirts and brought forward these sacred pieces of who they are for the world to see through the ribbon, cloth, and shapes they chose to adorn their skirts. On this day, the women came as they were and created moments of sharing, learning and helping. The women could be Indigenous without judgments, stigma, discrimination, or racism. While the skirts are made of fabric and ribbon, it symbolizes more than just an article of clothing, these skirts allowed for the women to walk proudly this day. The skirts will be something that will continue to carry them forward into the future as they learn more about what it means to be and who they are as Indigenous women.

Full Moon Ceremony

The participants shared information related to their experiences involved in the Full Moon ceremony where they identified mental health and wellbeing, identity, relationships among the women and the importance of having access to Elders and Knowledge Keepers in ceremonies through the one-to-one interviews attained after the completion of the gatherings.

The Full Moon ceremony took place in the heart of the inner city of Winnipeg in a courtyard secluded from the streets located at the William Norrie Center for the Faculty of Social Work located at 485 Selkirk Avenue. The Full Moon that night was very bright as it hung over the Northeast part of the sky. The fire was lit by one of the participants as the rest of the women settled into the culture room with the Ojibwe Knowledge Keeper preparing for the ceremony. Before starting, a smudge of sage was used to cleanse the feast food, along with her sacred items.

The participants all took part in smudging prior to the Knowledge Keeper sharing her teachings. The Full Moon ceremony teachings lasted about an hour and a half during before going into the court yard to participate in the Full Moon ceremony. The participants were provided with traditional knowledge around the importance of feast food and the origins of these foods, how copper is a gift to the people and why water ceremonies use this vessel, the markings on a turtles back and its significance to the lunar calendar, and why the relationship to Grandmother Moon is so significant in one's healing journey.

The Knowledge Keeper went into great detail on how Grandmother Moon came to the people, how she controls the waters of the world, and the waters that flow within women's bodies. It is in this time, once a month, where women are provided with the space for self-reflection and letting go of the struggles that burdens them. Grandmother Moon can be given these struggles or provide answers to the questions that their spirits seek for healing as she acknowledges that women carry so much and that this ceremony is not only to honor them but to remind them of their gifts as water carriers.

As the participants were given yellow cloth to make their tobacco ties that would go into the sacred fire, the Knowledge Keeper requested that the participants think about why they were there and what were they asking of Grandmother Moon. Many of their responses were very deep with intent where they understood clearly what they were asking of Grandmother Moon, or what they were willing to let go of.

Mental health and well-being. The Full Moon ceremony is gentle. It allows participants to come as they are with whatever they are carrying holistically – emotionally, spiritually, psychologically, and even physically. When looking at the continuum of healing, there is no straight line, and it is circular and continuously moving with a multitude of intertwined parts.

The three participants highlighted in this section are in different stages of their healing where they range from still being active in the sex industry, to recent involvement, and complete removal for over five years. This is important to highlight because Indigenous knowledge respects that healing can be a lifelong process and at any point, the mental health of an individual can be affected by both internal (e.g., trauma, grief) and external factors (e.g., the environment, situational triggers)

Mental health and wellbeing can become fractured due to several factors ranging from internal conflicts around trauma and re-wiring of the brain due to post-traumatic stress disorder to external factors that can trigger memories or flashbacks that resurface. The Full Moon ceremony offers a traditional way in which coping strategies can take place when dealing with the emotional aspects of healing that is not present within European or mainstream social work approaches to therapy and healing of emotional and psychological distress. The Full Moon offered a space to learn and develop further coping skills to help them better understand the letting go process, as well as asking for guidance and healing from Grandmother Moon.

One of the participants expressed having a deep connection to Grandmother Moon before this ceremony and that this relationship was vital to her. Somewhere along the way she stopped talking to Grandmother Moon and recognized at the ceremony how important this connection was for her to keep her balanced. She shared that she did non-Indigenous activities such as yoga and mindfulness practice, however, she expressed feeling too tired, and her head being too full to think about them. In the last year, she has been faced with an enormous task to confront her exploiter within the justice system and can recognize that she needs to seek out the love and guidance that comes from her spiritual relationship with Grandmother Moon. She shared,

I have conflict in my life that doesn't keep my mind at ease. I want [Grandmother Moon] to help me so that I don't come off as passive or aggressive. I need patience, I need guidance. I used to pray to Grandmother Moon, I used to cry to her, talk to her, when I sat in jail. I talk to her when I am lost. I am sad, broken, because of what he [exploiter] did...(A13)

This participant knew what she needed and placed her prayer into the tobacco tie that was then placed into the fire. As this took place, she looked back to the rest of the participants and got the support she needed to be able to let out the white buffalo calf call. She shared how important doing the white buffalo call was to her,

...my favorite part was the...screaming. The buffalo calling was the best part...So... Just yelling that loud, makes me feel like, instead of yelling negatively, I'm yelling positively to something that cares for me...you know... that...is very greatly honored, and...I can yell [that] energy to Grandmother Moon... (A13)

The calling out, and support from other women in the group creates strength and courage to let go of what the women were carrying into the Full Moon that night. The act of calling out the white buffalo call is symbolic of this strength within the spirits of the women and a reminder of their sacredness in such ceremonies.

Often in Western medical practices, prescriptions are offered so readily to anyone that is experiencing any form of mental health discomfort due to trauma and PTSD. Mainstream social work practice is equally at fault for overlooking Indigenous knowledge as a method of healing from trauma. Grandmother Moon offers one holistic approach to help aid in the mental health of Indigenous women by drawing on internal strengths and recognizing that the individual holds the key to their healing journey. It was evident as one woman recognized for herself that to move

forward in her healing, she could ask Grandmother Moon for what she needed to find herself on a deeper level,

I have anger issues, I recently came off my medication and felt this was the next step for me to heal. Things are coming up for me, trauma and PTSD. I am asking her for guidance to help deal with this anger. I am asking her for forgiveness, to speak kind words and respect. (A2)

When choosing to come off medications, there is a stigma associated with this choice, and people can be perceived as noncompliant when resisting such medications. Medication is a standard answer for people who are struggling internally and often more readily available than ceremonies. Western coping skills taught to an individual in social work often excludes working with Indigenous ceremonies. This woman knew what she needed and took a bold step to stop taking her medication, but also trusted in the ceremony and spirit of Grandmother Moon to guide her.

Another participant is a helper in the community with women who are sexually exploited and have a deep passion for the work. Although there has been movement in mainstream social work practice that is starting to acknowledge that an individual may never heal from trauma, they experienced rather it is managed. There is still a misconception that once a person has found healing, they are fixed and do not require the same supports; however, trauma can resurface at any time, and without notice even with treatment.

Helpers or those in helping roles in social service programs in the community are exposed to vicarious trauma and that can trigger strong emotions that resurface their own experiences and mental health issues. Especially for experiential women giving back to the community, access to ceremonies is a crucial component in balancing their wellbeing – caring

for themselves as they assist others. They can use the ceremony to keep themselves spiritually safe and to create a balance of protection with the help of their ancestors and spirit helpers. One woman shared,

I have experienced a lot of challenges around mental health and depression. I am trying to drag myself out of this. I am tired, there is a lot on me and I need renewal, I am asking [Grandmother Moon] to give me this and to take the negative energy away and replace it with positivity. I love helping others, but how can I help others when I am not well myself. Helping others is what I love to do. (A5)

Full Moon ceremonies in comparison to Western therapies offer a more holistic approach to healing, it calls on the spirit of the individual and gently offers a way of coping that is non-invasive and genuinely meets individuals where they are. Grandmother Moon offers her gifts of truth, and it is for the taking if the individual chooses. There are no expectations, unrealistic goals, no concept of failure by not completing therapy or taking medications, Grandmother Moon accepts the very fabric of women, and this ceremony is a true reflection of the kindness and love within Indigenous knowledge. When working with Indigenous people that experience mental health issues, social work practice would benefit by considering how ceremonies like the Full Moon could support women on their healing journey.

Identity is a necessary component for Indigenous peoples in knowing who we are and how we walk in this world with the confidence of being grounded in traditional and cultural norms. Colonization disrupted generations of Indigenous people's identity, and as a result of this disruption, the identity of Indigenous people has been affected (Spears, 2003). The transmission of Indigenous knowledge is an important component in reclaiming one's identity and for so many seeking to know who they are, they have to take a journey of self-discovery back to their

roots as Indigenous people. This reclamation of self is not an easy path to walk down, and it can be thought-provoking, uncomfortable, confusing, and scary to find out what it means to be an Indigenous person. However, the other side of this is the positive aspects of curiosity, openness to learning, and the spiritual growth that takes place when reclaiming who a person is through ceremonies and traditional knowledge (Spears, 2003).

Out of the 10 participants who attended the Full Moon, half of them had never experienced the ceremony, and four shared how the Full Moon ceremony opened the door to understanding more about who they are as Indigenous women. One woman shared,

I want to learn my culture and traditional ways. I feel disconnected, like I didn't belong, I feel lost. I need to heal, this will help me heal. My grandmother went to residential school and was taught this way was bad medicine. I was taught this was bad medicine, there was nothing traditional in her house, and I was never taught anything about this. I feel that the missing pieces will come back to me. (A2)

Grandmothers who were at residential school shared what they learned at those schools. They did not want their families practicing Indigenous ways. However, the women longed to reconnect to the Indigenous ways despite their grandmothers' perspectives. One woman shared,

To be honest, I thought we were connecting with...a bad thing...I don't want to say witchcraft. That's what I was known to know what it's for. But, just having her [Knowledge Keeper] speak about it gave me an understanding of what it means...I am new to this culture, you know, Native culture stuff. I grew up with this being told to me - it's a bad way of life...I apologize, this is like my first time like doing this, so I don't know like how to name stuff, and can't memorize what is that, that part like when we did ...the offering to the fire, and I kind of like got a little emotional, well I got emotional. I

feel like this ceremony is [going] help me in a way of ...finding home within my spirit and finding my identity...I'm just looking forward to that...what touched me was when doing that tobacco offering thing, (laughter), I'm sorry (A9)

Other women experienced negative messages about their identity and who they are because of their family line.

When I was driving here today, I was thinking about even just the last name that I was given, and how slandered it gets, you know people are like oh you're just a whatever. I'm just like holy...like is it that bad...But even when I even look further than myself, I don't see any roots, I don't see nothing...this experience was, you know, was amazing...I've never like I said earlier, I've never attended a Full Moon ceremony, so this was all brand new to me... it just makes me feel...connected, because before this, I didn't know any of this, I don't know my roots, I don't know nothing. And you know for me I almost feel honored because its starting with not even just me, but even in my family origin... it's got to begin somewhere and its beginning right now...that's where it feels really good (A18)

Another factor that plays into identity is lateral violence within the Indigenous community around fair skin versus darker skin and the conflict that exists around one being more Indigenous than the other. One participant shared her personal experience around how this made her question her identity as an Indigenous woman.

Last year something terrible happened to me in this neighborhood, and to be in this place so close to where it happened, I have hung onto this this whole time. They cut my hair and told me I was a fake Indian because of the color of my fair skin. This upset me this whole time...Sometimes when I come into gatherings, I questioned my purpose...do I

even belong here...I feel uncomfortable because of my skin...How [the Full Moon ceremony] can help me is, it's the loss of identity thing and people always thinking I was a wannabe, so...Its [going] to help me come out of my shell more and feel more comfortable because I felt connected...So, starting that here today is going to help me feel that any other day, or anywhere else. (A3)

The critical aspects of identity that affected the women were direct messages that were shared by grandparents, through religious teachings, residential schools, family of origin, and lateral violence in the community among Indigenous groups. The grandmothers who taught their grandchildren that Indigenous knowledge or ceremonies were bad medicine, had no intent of causing harm or confusion around identity for their families. They only inherited the trauma that originates from the residential schools that targeted children and drilled into them that their traditional ways were bad. Whether it is to protect their family, or their genuine belief in religion, a grandmother's love and protection from harm is evident behind the stories shared by the women.

Despite the differences each of the women shared around identity, two significant things emerged from their stories. One, colonization has touched them directly and indirectly, and two, they all want to know more about who they are as Indigenous women. They are curious, asking questions, and starting to think more critically about what they have been taught or told and developing skills through ceremonies and connections to Elders and Knowledge Keepers where they are making sense of this for themselves. Power is located in Indigenous ways of knowing through blood memory (Allen, 1999). This power is real and alive in all humans, and it is this knowing that something is missing that keeps Indigenous women seeking to find the answers

they are entitled to know. It is in the seeking that they will continue to shape who they are as they become grounded in the healing aspects of reclaiming their identity

Western social work practices have benefits within a clinical setting that assist many people; however, it focuses on the mental, physical, and emotional aspects of the person but often leaves out the spiritual work. When working with Indigenous people, it needs to be Indigenous-led. Knowledge Keepers and Elders are the practitioners that hold the answers for Indigenous people; they carry the traditional knowledge within ceremonies and teachings that taps into the spirit of the person. The Knowledge Keeper focuses on all aspects of the individual and looks at how to get the spiritual house in order with the mental, physical, and emotional self. We must trust them the way we trust social workers to do the workaround healing without questioning their level of education or ability to help to heal their people. For thousands of years, our people lived this way of life, and despite colonization, ceremonies like the Full Moon have survived and continue to exist through the people.

The Full Moon ceremony is a perfect example of Indigenous healing practices that is non-invasive, is it a slow, gentle process that is gradually based on the needs of the women participants. The Full Moon does not force Indigenous women to focus directly on their trauma; it focuses on identity, ceremony, and traditional teachings. One month after the Full Moon ceremony, the women were individually interviewed to explore further if, and how the ceremony helped them. The women either asked Grandmother moon to take what they were carrying or receive guidance from her. During the interview process, the women responded if they felt their prayers were answered. The following are a few of the responses from the women where they expressed what they initially asked, and their response one month after the Full Moon ceremony. One woman shared,

April 17, 2019 – I was in a ten-year relationship where I was bad into drugs. My daughter went into the care of CFS and was living with her grandparents for ten years. She came home six years ago, she is sixteen now, and she is angry. I know she is hurting, and I am hurting too. I want to let this go tonight, to start our relationship off fresh (A14)

When asked if she remembered what she was asking of Grandmother moon, she was unable to recall. The above quote was read to her and her response filled with shock and at moments she was teary-eyed,

I asked to let go of something and I must have. I must have because I can't remember...I know it was a certain something...[quote above was re-read to her]... Yeah. It's almost like me and my girl are not butting heads all the time. We're just good now. If she's grouchy, I'm okay with it. And if I'm grouchy, she's okay with it. We're not taking it personally anymore...It's like we all got over that hunch or something. It was weird. That has brought tears to my eyes. Oh my god. That's so powerful. Holy shit. I can't wait to go tell her that. That is so cool. (A14)

One of the beautiful aspects of the Full Moon ceremony is that this is an example of letting go and healing taking place. She was able to place what she was carrying into the sacred fire and continue to move forward in a good way. This woman attributed not being able to remember what she asked for that night as an indicator that the Grandmother Moon answered her. When accessing ceremonies such as this, the individual defines how healing has occurred in their lives. There is no social work theory, or tool used to assess the truth behind her words or if healing took place. Rather, it is about connections made by the individual that creates a space for healing work and trusting the power of their spirit to receive guidance from traditional ceremonies. Another woman who felt that Grandmother Moon answered her had an opportunity

to share her story around sexual exploitation and the journey she took for healing through Indigenous ceremonies and teachings. This was what she asked of Grandmother Moon,

I want to learn more about ceremony. I am doing a public speaking engagement in a few weeks on how traditional teachings is incorporated into my own healing. I am scared. I grew up in a white neighborhood with a white foster family. I was always ashamed of my culture. Today, I am ashamed that I was ashamed in the first place. I am asking Grandmother Moon for guidance, to keep me strong emotionally (A4)

When asked if Grandmother Moon answered her, her response was,

Absolutely, yeah. I definitely would not have been able to do that conference, I sought guidance and I felt that I had that courage. Had I not asked for courage and guidance, I wouldn't have been able to do it. So those are the signs that I feel [are part of] our culture and our traditional ways...You can feel it...there's definitely a more spiritual aspect...It's almost like you're getting that rush of vibrations through your body, it makes your hair stand up and makes you want to cry.

Both women felt that Grandmother Moon answered them; one was asking to take away guilt while the other explicitly asked for the courage to share her story and speak her truth. These requests of Grandmother Moon may not present to others as healing taking place from a western perspective; however, this is precisely how Indigenous ceremonies work. Both of the women knew what they needed that night, they set their intentions, and with the help of Grandmother Moon, their prayers were answered.

A couple of women in this study are working in positions where they work front line with women and youth who are experiencing sexual exploitation. One shared how her journey of recovery is ongoing and at times, can become triggered by the work she does. Despite working in

an organization that completely supports her recovery, she recognizes for herself that the healing work she has done in the past requires ongoing work. In the above section under mental health, she was the one who acknowledged that she was having challenges around mental health and depression, she was asking for renewal and for Grandmother Moon to take away the negativity in her life and replace it with positivity. She recognized that for her to continue to work frontline and help others once in her position, she needed to be well herself. During the interview, when asked if she felt Grandmother Moon answered her prayers, her response was as followed,

...I have the strength now to go out. I'm doing outreach again...Last week was only my first night. I felt like I was strong again, I could go out and do that...It might take a little...while but I think she hears my prayers. And again, I prayed this weekend and promised her the same thing. You know just to keep me going, that strength, you know? ...When you have that negativity playing in the back of your mind it can shed out all of the positivity, right? You got to always keep that balance... (A5)

One of the fascinating aspects of healing is the opportunity to give back to others. This woman is an expert in her experiences and can relate to the challenges that confront other women who are trying to find their voice and space for healing. Taking personal experiences and giving back to the people and community in the way that she does is in line with Indigenous values. Her own experiences not only make her an expert in the area of exiting from the sex industry, but she also is a beacon of hope for other women who are still trying to find their way out of the sex industry. Personal experience in the Indigenous community is seen as highly valuable and requires this emic knowledge to be honored and celebrated the same way we would honor or celebrate a social work student graduating from a university or working in the community (Ed Azure, Personal communication, 2018).

One of the important teachings to be mindful of for anyone accessing ceremonies is to know what you are asking from Creator or spirit helpers. There are many teachings around asking for strength; however, several Knowledge Keepers share the same teachings around this. If you ask for strength, you will be given more hardships to work through, and within these hardships, your prayers of strength will be eventually answered (Sherry Copenace, Personal Communication, 2018). One of the women in this study asked for strength where she shared what her experience was like regarding this,

...I have to be really careful when I pray. I got to try...not [to] ever use that word strength ever...but what I had prayed for, it did [happen] what I had prayed for, is...some of my family is still suffering harshly from addictions, and it affects my daily life, as well as the kids daily life, so I asked for strength...I got home and there was a babysitter and he [referring to partner] was gone for three days, he partied until he ended up in medical detox in the emergency room. So yeah, a near death experience I guess, is what she sent me for him. When I prayed for strength from her, and I should never do that. That word strength, that's something else. She did, because he almost died. And I thought to myself as I was sad and torn, "Okay, is this the answer? Is he being taken out of my path. Is this how it's going to go. (A11)

The experiences she had because of the Full Moon ceremony and asking for strength is compelling. When asking for strength in ceremonies, it will come in the most unlikely way, and the person is exposed to further hardships to give them strength. It is in these moments that self-reflection and being aware of this connection is important for healing to take place. Moments like this, where she experienced further hardships, is connected to her asking for strength. She

knew Grandmother Moon stood with her, and she knew the connection to the difficulties presented to her and her family was due to the strength she prayed for her.

The Full Moon ceremony, as identified by the women in this study, created a space to be connected to other women survivors where they acknowledged the strength found in their collective voice and support for one another. The Full Moon builds on the natural instincts to care for one another the same way the women were able to take care of one another on the streets when they were their most vulnerable. There is a power found in the collective, identity shared and nurtured, along with being empowered by the voices of other warrior women who have shared similar walks in life that led them to the Full Moon ceremony. One woman shared,

And I felt connected, you know, not even just to the Full Moon, but to everybody here.

And I truly believe that we were all brought here, you know, to be together, to experience this together and...I get to take the teachings with me, and that's, I don't know is a good feeling.

Another woman also shared her thoughts,

Well, it was nice seeing women work together instead of always being like, "Hey, you little, whatever." You know? It's pretty nice having a bunch of group of women around that know how to be civil and kind to each other. (A3)

Supporting one another and the power found in relationships took place between several women in this study. For one of the women that never experienced ceremonies before and felt conflicted about the teachings due to their religious upbringing, she often presented as quieter and withdrawn at times. Despite how she presented, the support she received by the group of women was that of understanding as they wrapped their spirits around her. One woman shared,

I figured she would be the first to jump ship, and she wasn't. She stuck it through...So, it showed me something, that she's hungering for that knowledge. She's hungering for it and I think this is the first time she's ever been shown anything...I was straight...bugging her and saying things to her and smiling, "Come sit with me."...Right, the sense of community. (A11)

In social work, group work is a place in which the creation of relationships occurs through support shared amongst participants. By creating this internal support system within women that participate in group work, this encourages mentorship of one another. Both western and Indigenous approaches to healing that offer group work share this commonality by fostering the internal strengths individuals carry and creating an atmosphere of giving back. One of the differences, however, is the Full Moon does not require a setting where a therapist sets the agenda; it is the teachings provided by the Knowledge Keeper that creates the space for the women to pick and choose what stands out for them the most. One woman, who happened to be one of the sisters shared how being part of the Full Moon in a group setting helped her relationship to her sister,

...In the beginning, when we first became moms and whatever, we were tight. We were very tight, fuck, always. Then obviously drugs, addiction, exploitation, that all came into play in both of our lives and even together. It damaged something there. Then it was hard because even when I started on my journey first, I didn't want nothing to do with her because that was for me. It hurt me because I had to push her away. I've always had problems with female relationships. I really have. I think it's because of my sister and my mom, right. I don't want to experience that again. I don't want to hurt over somebody again like that. Even when she started on her journey, and she started getting clean, and

stuff like that, I was still hesitant. I still kind of backed up a little bit. Okay, I'll watch you for a little bit...she has come a fucking million miles since where I've seen her. Hell, anybody's going to tell me that I cannot continue my relationship with her. I fought. I fought...I feel we're getting stronger. That makes me happy because, like I said, I got issues with female relationships. If I can start with her, the last one I had, and rebuild that, maybe that might help me in the future...I think as long as me and her can rebuild that relationship in a positive way, there isn't fucking nothing I'm scared of no more.

While one of the sisters acknowledged the importance of attending the Full Moon with her sister, the other one had a very different opinion; however, both perspectives are valid. The other sister shared,

Well, it was really good, but like, I know having family in groups like this kind of pushes them back a little on what to say...It was really good, don't get me wrong, I liked it. I loved her being a part of the group and stuff but I probably would have shared something totally different that day if she wasn't sitting there. Because I don't want her to judge me...(A3)

Despite the one sister expressing her perspective of the Full Moon, both sisters were pleased to have one another during this study as they both felt it created an opportunity to move forward in their relationship in a positive way. However, group work, whether it is through Western or Indigenous healing approaches, has its own sets of challenges when families are doing their healing work together. It is essential to be mindful that even gentle ceremonies like the Full Moon can still have internal challenges for participants.

For the women in this study, it was important to create a space where they could articulate for themselves what they felt stood out about their participation in the Full Moon

Ceremony. By asking this question, it creates a better understanding of what teachings they received from the Knowledge Keeper based on their experiences. When sharing teachings, what individuals take away is also part of healing. One woman never participated in a Full Moon ceremony with this being her first experience. Here is what she shared,

The full moon ceremony stood out a lot because there was an elder here who spoke about it and just what we did about giving through tobacco. And I don't know, I felt like I let go of a lot of things with the fire and...the buffalo [call] just to let go. So yeah, it was freeing, and I felt at home (A2)

While she expressed the teachings around tobacco and feeling at home, another woman, before the Full Moon ceremony, questioned if she could receive more than one spirit name. She expressed how the Knowledge Keeper helped her find a better understanding of this,

She [Knowledge Keeper] said something about her names and she had one for going through sobriety and stuff and that part kind of stuck out to me...Should I be greedy, because I already had one right. That one I got going through sobriety as well, but I've never been sober since then, so I was like, should I really get another name?...I have three of them. One of them I can't remember. But every time I was sober for a couple weeks and then I'd fall and go into using again. So, I decided to get another name because of her, and she said she had those ones through her sobriety and stuff like that. (A3)

While both of the women expressed different teachings that stood out for them, what was important to understand was the significance of the Knowledge Keeper's role in transmitting the knowledge she shared with them. Both women created an understanding of themselves through these teachings, and because this was what stood out for them, it will continue to follow the women in creating that space within themselves to seek out more answers and how this applies to

their lives. The knowledge Keeper brought in a few sacred items that are part of her ceremony bundle and provided several teachings for the women in this study. One of the items she had was a turtle shell, and she explained in detail the significance of the turtle being the correct calendar for Indigenous people. The 13 moons, each with its teachings were shared amongst the group. For one woman, this teaching proved to be significant to her,

I was going to say the turtle, but the turtle shell. Every time I see a turtle shell, I'm counting [the thirteen plates on a turtles back]. Some little things stuck...there wasn't a whole lot that was able to stick with me but that one. Yeah...It was just a lot of information to hold. Not saying that I wouldn't be open to going again because every time you go, you always learn something new and something else will stick, right. I guess, that's what that kind of helped me was, was opening that door to how Full Moon Ceremony works and that I would go again. (A18)

Another woman felt that the teaching around the sacred feast foods was what stood out for her. The teachings around ancestors needing to recognize the traditional foods that come from the land before colonization is evident in the community as more Elder's and Knowledge Keepers are sharing these teachings. Here is what one woman shared,

The way we eat, yeah. That stuck out because I'd... The full moon that I had gone, always gone to we've never really had a feast after but when she talked about the foods and that these were the four first foods so that stuck out for me. Like the fish, the rice, the berries and the water. (A5)

Teachings like the ones the women in this study were given by the Knowledge Keeper become part of their medicine bundle. Medicine bundles hold sacred items and teachings that can be shared with others to become part of their bundle. The Knowledge Keeper shared parts of her

bundle by passing the teachings to the women in this study in a good way. The stories, sacred foods, and sacred items that the women recalled having a great significance to them will guide them to seek more teachings that will help further define their identity as Indigenous women.

Summary. Identity is an important aspect of healing because colonization disrupted the women's understanding of self, and their identity as Indigenous women. Ceremonies like the Full Moon that focuses on women's roles in community, family and within themselves fosters reclamation. Reclaiming culture and space within Indigenous traditional values is a long road which is an integral part of the healing of Indigenous women who experienced sexual exploitation.

Sweat Lodge Building and Ceremony

The participants related their experiences of building and participating in the Sweat Lodge ceremony. They shared their experiences of creating and participating inside the Sweat Lodge, the importance of the Knowledge Keeper sharing teachings and conducting the ceremony, what Indigenous healing looks like, and the importance of the visions that were experienced. The information was gathered through the recorded talking circles, and the one-to-one interviews that took place after the completion of the gatherings.

The creation of the sweat lodge involved physical work with teachings shared around the significance of the structure and placement of the willow branches. For the women in this study, it was important to have them participate in deconstructing the former sweat lodge to clear the space for the reconstruction of the one they were going to build. Seven out of the ten women were brought out to the University of Manitoba where the sweat lodge stands close by the river bank. None of the women in this study had the experience of constructing a sweat lodge before; however, one of the participants observed one being built and received teachings previous to

participating in this one. Most of the women also experienced being in a sweat lodge once or twice, but none of them actively attended regularly or received the teachings connected to the sweat lodge.

There are many teachings of the creation story connected to how the sweat lodge came to be for the people, and it is meaningful to acknowledge that the different teachings shared among the different tribes are all valid with one not being more important than the other (Sherry Copenace, personal communication, 2018). For the sweat lodge that was built, the women were taught Cree teachings from Knowledge Keeper Ed Azure. When constructing the sweat lodge, Ed Azure shared with the women the process that took place in selecting the willows that were very compassionate and loving. One woman shared how outstanding this teaching was for her,

I was just like, "Wow. So much thought goes into it." It's not just, just go grab a branch and bring it back here. It has to be specific and asking for it. Then even him giving the teaching, I was kind of getting emotional because he's asking for her children...for us to use to build where we need to come heal. (A18)

The women in this study were taught why there is a divide in the sweat lodge with one half representing women, and the other half representing males. For each side, the willows represent birth, childhood, teenagers, wanderers, parents, grandparents, and Elders. Each willow intertwines with both sides that create the balance required to hold the sweat lodge up in the dome-shaped, or what appears to be the turtles back. One woman shared her thoughts regarding the building of the sweat lodge,

What stood out for me...is the willow branches the teachings behind them; Baby, child, teenager, wanderer, parent, grandparent and elder. You know it was nice to know that and just if you put us together and told us to build a sweat lodge I wouldn't have done it that

way. It would've been like 10 little branches put together and put something over top
(laughter from the group) (A18)

For all the women who gathered on this day the willow branch that represented wanderers stood out as this offered insight into their own personal experiences and how some of the women expressed feeling stuck or explaining the challenges they have been faced with in their adult life. One of the ladies shared,

That was pretty good. It wasn't the way I did it before, but I understand that not everybody's the same way and stuff like that so I kind of learned something different from the first time I ever did it. I got to [know about the] fire, I got to know what the willows are, and they didn't teach us that when I did it the first time, so that was pretty cool... The wanderer, I liked that one... because we're all wanderers. I'm like, "wow, there we are." And it was pretty neat... (A3)

Another woman also shared her thought regarding the same teaching,

The wanderer stood out to me... It was the main part of the lodge. And that's like a major part of our life. Right? I think that's a part where I was for a long time. I'm not in that now, I'm in the adult part now. But yeah that really stood out to me... (A14)

The teachings shared brought a sense of understanding for the women and how some of them were still wondering and trying to figure out their place in life. Another woman also shared her perspective regarding the wandering stage of life,

And then me, I had one that almost hit line me (Willow poll). And I'm just going to take a step back, "wonder" that's where my trauma... I swear to God, that's where I got all my trauma. I was like, I'm that wander."

For the women that could identify how the “wandering” stage of the life cycle was still present in their lives or the difficulties, they faced as they transitioned in the next stage of their lives all could relate to the wandering parts of their selves. The life cycle teachings the women were given based on the willow polls can help to explain why they behave the way that they do and offer understanding of themselves. This more profound understanding of the self is healing and strengthens Indigenous women to seek out further teachings and applying it to their own mental and spiritual wellbeing and their movement into pivotal life cycle stages that shape our experiences.

Creating the Sweat Lodge. All too often, when participating in ceremonies such as the sweat lodge, it is not uncommon to show up to the ceremony where everything is prepared and ready for people to use. However, by participating in building a sweat lodge, a deeper appreciation is created that connects the teachings to the meaning and purpose of the sweat lodge that deepens this connection to the spirit world and Creator. One woman shared,

Like building the sweat. Especially the building of this sweat. If we would've just went in there, it probably wouldn't have meant as much. (A14)

One person cannot construct the sweat lodge on their own; it takes a community; otherwise, the strength of the sweat lodge will be weak. It was the women helping one another and gathering as a collective in a gentle way that promotes healthy and positive relationships as they worked closely with the willow.

The sweat lodge. The teachings, the building of it, the actual hands on of it, the understanding and the girls all together, the community together, doing it together even though none of us had done it before. Watching them throw themselves into it, that was

big for me. And then, the sweat itself and the knowledge of knowing I built this sacred place and sweating in there. (A11)

The women in this study poured their heart into creating the sweat lodge and felt a sense of pride in knowing that their love and hard work was going to be shared among the women. One woman shared,

...It's going to remain there for other people's healing. I know our energy's going to be there. It's going to feel like they're going somewhere so warm and loving [by] strong women, and of all different ages and at all different places in their lives. That was nice (A11)

The other side to the creation of the sweat lodge is the importance of being able to give back. When we give back to our community, there is a sense of contentment, belonging, and feelings of joy that they contributed to the wellbeing of others. A perfect example of this was shared by one of the women in this study,

When I talk about going to University of Manitoba Sweat Lodge...it's a universal Sweat Lodge. It's not the men who build it...It's like you got a program full of girls and this is what you were called to do, we are going to do that for those girls. And that's that traditional part...(A13)

Being on the land and working with the willow is also therapeutic. It is about the connection being made to Mother Earth by using the materials needed for healing; we become part of her in a way that lifts one's spirit by touching the gifts given to our people that nurtures this relationship.

For two of the women in the study, they were not able to go into the sweat lodge; one was on her Moon Time (menstruation) while the other woman shared, she was using illicit substances

the day before attending. For the woman that was on her Moon Time, she was able to participate in other ways aside from not being able to enter into the sweat lodge. This is what she shared,

I just loved it. I loved taking it down. I liked putting it up. I enjoyed the labor. I enjoyed the ladies that we did it with. Some of them are really, really amazing women...from all walks of life. It was a good day. It was just a good day I can look back on and I can remember the faces. Or even taking the willow...we all had to work together to get the willow out of the truck. That, this is women that don't know each other, that have only met a handful of times, coming together for a common purpose and cause and there's beauty in that. That's community. That's belonging. That's connectedness. That's sisterhood. That is what being Indigenous is. (A1)

The other woman in this study who openly shared she used illicit substances the day before the gathering, guidance was sought out from the Knowledge Keeper, Ed Azure as part of our traditional protocols. After seeking guidance from the Knowledge Keeper, he explained that her participating in creating, or going into the sweat lodge would be dangerous for her. Different Elders and Knowledge Keepers in the community have their protocols around when it is safe to enter ceremonies, and with the Ed Azure, he intended to honor where everyone was at and to keep the women safe. It is essential to respect that protocols are important to follow as the knowledge attained to conduct ceremonies are passed down from generation to generation and to be kept intact (Ed Azure, Personal communication, 2019). However, despite not being able to participate here is what she shared,

I enjoyed it. It was interesting to know how a sweat lodge was built, and just sitting back and observing. (A9)

Although she was not able to fully participate, it was essential to ensure that she was

invited to stay and still be involved in a different capacity. For the two women that sat outside the sweat lodge while it was being conducted, they had the opportunity to connect and find their meaning and purpose in the teachings that took place during this time. For one of the women, she had never been to a sweat lodge while the other one had been to her first one within the last year. What was shared with me afterward, when all the women came out of the sweat lodge, was the struggles one of the women experienced. For the one that never participated in a sweat lodge, she grew up with a robust Christian faith where Indigenous ceremonies were considered to be bad medicine. During the one-to-one interview, she shared her thoughts regarding what took place for her,

Yeah. I'm just trying to find the right words...but the singing, it kind of scared me a little bit, some of the songs the elder was singing, because I'm not used to that. Just how my cultural thing is different...It kind of made me uncomfortable, but at the same time, I was trying not to judge and be respectful. This is their way of healing, or something like that. Just being respectful. (A9)

Ceremonies have a way of bringing people together, and often, there is a teaching that is meant to be received even if full participation could not occur. A perfect example of this was shared by the woman who was supporting the other woman who was struggling internally,

I wasn't meant to go into the sweat lodge that day. I was meant to be a helper, which is my nature...To be a helper, I can tell you that I did feel a little envious of those who did get to go into the sweat lodge that we built together, as a group. When I walked away from that I realized my purpose in that day was not to be in the lodge. It was to be a helper. It was to be there to nourish. I was there to love like I do. (A1)

Among the women that were not able to attend ceremonies, they had this understanding that if they did not make it, despite attempts to go, they feel that Creator was with them and that it was not meant to be.

Illicit substances: Questions around ceremony and access to ceremony. Having access to ceremonies while under illicit substances is a question that often comes up within the community for Indigenous women who are exiting the sex industry. The women in this study identified that it was something they felt they needed, and for them to have a safe space to come as they are, regardless of being under the influence of illicit substances. For example, one woman shared how protocols around ceremonies are barriers to healing,

...I know there's some teachings that actually scared me at first, even trying to get involved with that. That was, you can't smudge unless you're 24 hours sober or you cannot access the sweat if you've just been high. To me, that scares them because then it's like, "Well, fuck, I'm always going to be high. If you're not going to let me in the sweat and at least experience that when I feel that I need to, how am I ever going to?" (A18)

This speaks volumes to what the women identify they need, and to reach out and have the courage to come as they are at any stage of their healing. When accessing ceremonies like the sweat lodge or the Full Moon, there is a fear around rejection and being further isolated from the community because of the stigma attached to not only using illicit substances but for their experiences of being sexually exploited. One woman shared,

...You know what, they pushed me out. I really wanted to be a part of their Full Moon. Like this last organization, some of them talked to me like I was nothing. (A13)

Another woman also shared her experiences in trying to access ceremony while exiting the sex industry,

We are judged from the minute we walk in the door and they know that we're prostitutes. Judged that we are alcoholics, we are drug addicts, we are dirty...And the minute they know about my past, their ideas and the way they treat me change dramatically...And, once they found out about my past, suddenly, I wasn't invited to too many and then less, until I was never invited...That's the only reason. There was no disagreement...But, because we're already seen as dirty, they don't want us around in the community...(A11)

For the women in this study, it was pressing to create a space for the women to come as they are without judgements. The Knowledge Keeper was integral to creating an environment for the women where they were accepted just as they are. For the women who expressed feeling judged within their community when trying to access ceremony, this is not uncommon.

A key aspect of breaking this cycle of perpetuating colonial isolation for Indigenous women is to create more awareness of why and how this all began. In doing so, we create awareness that uplifts our women to a place of honor that attempts to break the chains of colonization that have created their experiences. Knowledge is not just central for the women to reclaim who they are; knowledge is a power for the community to take a stand and be part of the solution in ending sexual exploitation for Indigenous women.

Importance of the Knowledge Keeper. My relationship with Ed Azure was an important prerequisite to introducing the women to him. I trusted Ed because of the love he has for our community and his passion for being a helper for those seeking healing through traditional ceremonies like the sweat lodge. Through my relationship, trust was established, and through that trust, I was able to open the door for the women to be around an individual that protects the hearts of our women. It is essential that when bringing males into ceremonies to help do healing with work with Indigenous women who have been sexually exploited to take extra

measures regarding safety for everyone involved.

Through conversations and preparations made with Ed before the gathering, discussions took place about the importance of having another female present to not only create that balance that is needed for the women in this study, but to also honor Ed's role in this process. Most of the women in this study prefer and feel safer in ceremony with female Elders or Knowledge Keepers. However, when following protocols around keeping everyone safe, beautiful teachings are not only shared, but the women have an opportunity to be around a healthy male role model that truly respects and honors Indigenous women's roles within family and community.

Our Knowledge Keeper and his helpers truly respected the women in this study and treated them with the dignity they deserved. There was four male helpers and one female helper that assisted Ed and the women. Their treatment towards the women had a high impact on all of them as they walked away from this experience with a different understanding of how they are deserving of respect as strong Indigenous women. Our knowledge Keeper, Ed Azure, took a stand with the women by not only honoring who they are as Indigenous women but shared many vital teachings about their roles in community and family. The women listened intensively as he shared teachings of the fire. One woman said,

...In speaking with our Elder, our Knowledge Keeper... he shared something really beautiful with me and something that really resonated with me. The Cree word for fire, when broken into English, is a woman's heart... What I can tell you is that I've learned in my walk...there are some things that feel like home, that resonate with your whole being and there are no words. There are no words to explain that feeling, that moment. I don't have any words. I can say that I was meant to be there. I was meant to get that teaching that day, for whatever reason and I don't know why today I received it, but I'll know

soon. (A1)

It was important to have our Knowledge Keeper speak to the women about their roles prior to contact and how they had vital roles in all aspects of the community and politics where they had autonomy over their own lives (Ed Azure, personal communication, 2019). He also shared with the women that they have always been strong, despite colonization attempting to dismantle their roles in the community. It was explained how most Indigenous societies are matriarchal; women guiding the community, and how colonization switched this to patriarchy. He spoke of how Indigenous men were taught to enforce patriarchy on the women. He talked about “the rule of thumb” meant that beating a woman with a stick no larger than their thumb was European practice and never part of our traditions. As he said this, he shook his head and shared that he did not know what the men were thinking or why they did this, but that the effects of colonization and male domination over women are still present. (Ed Azure, personal communication, 2019). However, he also shared that there is a shift in our people, more and more women and men are reclaiming their roles and coming back to ceremonies and that this is a crucial aspect regarding healing and healing our nations.

The teachings shared with the women in this study, coupled with how the Knowledge Keeper and his helpers treated them with kindness and respect was significant to all the women that took part in building the sweat lodge. One woman shared,

...The elder was so nice, like he just was so gentle. And a lot of men these days...It almost feels like they look down on you...That's what I get with a lot of men. And he didn't. He just made you feel equal as him or something? You know what I mean? (A14)

Another woman also shared her thoughts regarding the Knowledge Keepers view of women,

When we were inside, it wasn't the sweat yet, but we were just sitting in there...he was

saying something about, oh, how women are strong, and we don't need men. It takes four of them to do what one of us can do. And it just feels good to have a partner there. He kept looking at me when he was saying these things, and I'm like, is he telling me something? Shit. And that's like, I was kind of still talking to that guy that I shouldn't be talking to, and I'm like, "Well, you know, I guess I'll just tell him to fuck off later now." I'm just kidding. Thanks, Ed. I'm just kidding. Yeah. I don't know. He's pretty good the way he talked about things. (A3)

Ed's message around the strength of a woman had a significant effect not only for her but was also felt by other women in this study. Another woman shared,

I think when we had that sweat, a lot of things Ed said had really impacted me a lot, the way he just [honored] the women. That made me feel good. That teaching, that day just was like, man. That's beautiful especially when his wife showed up, and the granddaughter, and just the way it was women. You know what I mean? It's true when he said, "We don't need a man." We don't. We could do everything on our own. I've been there. I've done it. (A18)

This teaching was so important to her that even during the one-to-one interview she would often refer to Ed's message. For example,

Ever since that day, I think it's been a little battlefield in my mind but a good one, right, because it's not that I'm fighting because I want to be single and go run and gallivant around. It's just, I really truly want to be happy. I just feel, if the relationship isn't truly making me happy, then why would I want to stay in that? I think the thing is that I have all boys. The last thing I want is them looking at our relationship thinking that his perspective on how a relationship should be is the way it should be because it's not. (A18)

The very presence of the Knowledge Keeper and the teachings he provided to the women about their strength and the historical aspects connected to colonization made a difference for the women. Within Indigenous ceremonies, listening and being around healthy family men that do not objectify women who have experienced sexual exploitation is important. One woman shared her thought about being inside the sweat lodge,

I like the Sweat Lodge. I like the Sweat Lodge because older men taught us. I liked the fact that we had that hands on and I liked the fact that we went in the dark with men... We are traumatized, working girls who have our own very vivid discriminative judgments on a man and it was very slow, very patient. We can open the door if you're uncomfortable. And it was a humbling feeling that those men understood if we needed a time to take a break being in the dark with those men... (A13)

It was important to create a space for the women in this study where healthy interactions with our male Knowledge Keeper was meaningful. By providing an opportunity to see that there are good men in the community that respectfully stand beside them can help in their healing by role modeling respectful interactions with women and sharing teachings on women's and men's roles. Being around men that respect the women in the way that Ed does, helps to set the bar on how they should be respected. The kindness and way in which he spoke and treated the women in this study were acknowledged. One woman shared how the kindness and respect given helped to change her perspective on men,

I don't have to think that they're all the same. And that even though my exploiter wasn't charged, I can move on with my life... I have good Indigenous people to help me make it out of anger, lingering anger. (A13)

For some of the women, they started questioning their relationships with men after the

sweat lodge. They identified this interaction as a powerful experienced. They are questioning the roles and responsibilities of the men in their lives and questioning unhealthy habits that they recognized taking place in their relationships and their experiences with men who sexually exploited them. They want respect in the way that they deserve and that honors their roles as Indigenous women not to be controlled or dominated.

Inside the Sweat Lodge. Inside the sweat lodge, it is dark, warm, and just like the womb of our mothers, it is meant to be a safe place with a small sacrifice of our discomfort being in the heat. There were four rounds that took place inside the sweat lodge, each honoring the four directions with specific teachings shared in each round. The rounds have no time frame, when the round is completed, the facilitator asked for the helper to open the door. Each of the rounds had intent and meaning where our Knowledge Keeper and his helpers shared teachings. Every woman received what they were meant to receive as it resonated within their spirit based on where they were at in their healing. One woman shared what was most significance for her was,

Yeah, he sang a song and it was really nice. And then he said something about like, throughout treatment and stuff, you've got to learn to love yourself to love other people. So this whole thing stuck in my head that I need to love myself, to love others...and I'm like, I have to like myself now? How the fuck do you like yourself? So that kind of stood out to me, that you have to like yourself in order to love yourself. And here I just thought you just had to love yourself. (A3)

For one woman, sitting in the dark created much discomfort for her. However, she was not alone; as a participant in the sweat lodge with the women in this study, another female helper was also available. The female helper happened to be sitting in between myself and another participant. You could hear the panic this woman experienced in her voice and hear how the

female helper brought her closer to her and told her to focus on her drum. Right after the sweat lodge was completed a talking circle took place, when asked what stood out for her, this was what she shared,

The drum, and that lady there, yeah like honestly if I wasn't holding that drum I probably would've left. And if I didn't keep drumming I don't know, it kept me focused otherwise my thoughts would've went off and it would've started thinking about stuff but I kept praying and focusing on the drum (A14)

After a week had passed, the same woman was interviewed one-to-one, when asked about what took place for her in the sweat lodge what she shared was very powerful,

I was never scared of the dark. Like never. What the hell? All of a sudden I'm scared of the dark... The last time I went to a sweat what was when I was child. So between now and then, a lot of shit has happened. Like I was abused a lot. And I think it comes from that... I made a drum a few months ago, and honestly it's just been sitting, hanging in my house. I am like, "What the hell am I going to use for?" So I brought it to the ceremony. To the sweat. And I took it in there with me. And yeah, I feel a connection with that now... it helped me through the sweat. I was so scared, and like hitting the drum just took my focus off my fear, I guess. I don't have that fear no more. The dark. I feel like I want to go to attend more sweat. (A14)

For many women who experienced childhood sexual abuse, there are often memories connected to their experiences of being in the dark. The sweat lodge is intended to be a safe place; however, it is also mindful to understand when working with survivors, the dark can stir up emotions and memories that are triggered. Having a female helper provides that gentleness and the guidance that was crucial for the woman to feel safe to stay for three rounds. In social

work practice, offering access to the sweat lodge also needs to be done with care for individuals who have experienced complex trauma. You not only have to be grounded but prepared to help in the same way our female helper was able to on this day.

Visions seen inside the Sweat Lodge. For three of the women sitting between the Western and Northern doorway, they all had a shared experience. They all described what felt like and sounded like little feet running behind them outside of the lodge. When this happened, I also heard the same tapping from across where they were sitting, and it was not until afterward that they shared what they felt. One woman shared,

...I felt something behind us and I was like, "What the fuck was that? "Yeah. So that was pretty cool...people always talk about, "Oh, this happened in the sweat or I seen this, and I seen this," and I'm like, "How come I never see nothing," and then I got to feel it...So it's starting. Hopefully one day I'll see something. (A3)

Another one of the woman also shared what she felt,

I felt like something moved behind me. And I was like, "What the hell was that?" Yeah, freaked me out. (A14)

Physical experiences such as this are not uncommon when accessing the sweat lodge or other traditional ceremonies. Although she did not experience a vision, visions are significant within Indigenous ceremonies. Our visions help guide us, send a message that often needs to be deciphered by the individual or with the help of an Elder or Knowledge Keeper (depending on the protocols). While I was in the sweat lodge, a butterfly came to me, and in that space inside the sweat lodge, the meaning was interpreted by one of the helpers, for this woman, the sharing of this vision stood out for her,

When he said about the butterfly and he said that resembles change, that was pretty cool.

I liked that. (A3)

Another woman had a vision; however, the meaning behind it was shared in private during the one-to-one interviews,

...When he was singing, I honestly swear, honest to God, Gitchi Manitou...I've seen that red eagle flying. And that is something that I will never forget...I could not believe that I was back in the Sweat Lodge...I was ignoring it (the eagle) I kept playing with my hair. And I'm like, "Am I going to see something?" Then they start praying, then you hear this loud voice? And then you see that clan dancing. I can't prove it. No one will ever know. But that was... wow.

When asked what she felt the meaning behind her vision was, she explained that men were trying to contact her in unhealthy ways through the sex industry and how her vision helped her. This was what she shared,

...I'm really hoping that eagle is watching all of us for the grace that I'm feeling, from these past weeks. I've received text, and I just brushed off. I've seen somebody who was creepy, brush it off and haven't been late for curfew. Maybe not that...It's just something's there watching, it just feels good to know that that eagle is that thing. And it's not a thing, it's an Eagle. (A13)

The vision that she experienced regarding the red eagle was attributed to her wellbeing and offered her the guidance that helped her get through moments where she would usually be triggered. What I cannot share is her spirit name, but what can be shared is her name, and the vision she had are correlated, this eagle is always with her. Visions like the one this participant experienced, are omitted in western social work practice. Working with the visions encountered in ceremonies are relevant to incorporate into the healing work. Our ways of knowing embrace

visions as real entities that can provide a tool used for healing, or teachings that otherwise would not be present in this physical space that we take up. Seeing past our physical self and opening up to the endless possibilities of the spirit world is required when incorporating Indigenous epitomes into social work practice. A perfect example of this was when the two sisters received their spirit names.

Our spirit names come from the spirit world, and the vision that our knowledge keeper received came from a place of love and with care. Not every Elder or Knowledge Keeper has the gift of seeing these sacred visions; however, it just so happened that Ed carried this gift and offered the women in this study the opportunity to receive their names. There are many different teachings and protocols involved in the process to receive a spirit name. The women learned Cree protocols on how to prepare. The preparation process has teachable moments, and I was gently reminded of this by Ed. I was offering to purchase the items to help some of the women prepare their offerings. However, I was told in a very gentle way to allow the women to prepare their items so they can create meaning and intention through the preparation of these items.

What I received from Ed was highly valuable, often in social work practice we want to help bring people to a place in their healing, but we cannot do the work for them and expect a positive outcome. We can provide the tools and teach a person how to use them, but ultimately, it is up to them whether these tools fit into their lives. So, for the two sisters that prepared their bundle to receive their names, there were important teachings that took place during this process. Had I helped them, they would not have the opportunity to learn it themselves. While in the sweat lodge, Ed was able to give one of the sisters her name, while the other one he needed to sit with the vision he had a little longer. The sister who did not receive her spirit name, this was her experience,

Yeah. Even with that, it was just telling me the poplar tree, and your name is going to be very powerful. That was like..."Man, this guy is speaking my language because there we go." He's almost telling me everything that I'm seeking. With him even not being able to give me my full name, that's okay because I'm a patient person. I feel like because I'm taking time to figure my way out, he's taking his time to have that right name given to me. It wasn't rushed. "I'll just figure out something and give it to her." You know what I mean? It was like, "No, sorry. It's sacred and powerful. They didn't give it to me yet but I'll get back to you." To me, that's okay because that's patience too. (A18)

About one week after the sweat lodge took place, Ed had shared what her spirit name was and the meaning behind this. However, during the one-to-one interviews, she had not received it. When asked how important her spirit name is regarding her identity as an Indigenous woman, she shared the following,

It almost made me feel like it put my life into perspective because, again, a thing I've been struggling a lot with lately is my purpose...the purpose for my children...I'm Just longing for a purpose and haven't quite figured it out yet. Then even just him (Knowledge Keeper), the way he did that, it's sacred. That just made me feel really good about myself because...I feel, sometimes, that I am this old soul. You know what I mean? I am going to bring something to somebody's table one day. Then I'm going to be like, there it is. (A18)

A couple of days after the interview was completed, Ed shared with me her spirit name. When she was told what it was and the meaning behind it, she was overjoyed. What was really interesting that was pointed out and can be shared, is that her and her sisters' names come from place where Creators civil servants connects the two in a very deep spiritual way. For the sister

that did receive her name, this was what she shared,

...It was funny because she didn't get hers, and I kept thinking the whole time, somebody's not going to get their name. And it was her. So I was like, oops. It was pretty nice and I still don't know how to say it (spirit name)...I like how me and my son's and my daughter's (spirit names) kind of clashes together...my son too, when he was a baby, his name came from the thunderbirds as well, so that was pretty cool. So it's like, "Damn, son." Yeah. Yeah.

Our spirit names are sacred; therefore, it is up to the individual to choose to share this with others. However, what can be shared is that she does have other spirit names, and the name she received in the sweat lodge that day was specifically there to be with her as she moves through her recovery and maintaining her sobriety. When she was in the Full Moon ceremony, the Knowledge Keeper shared with the group about having a spirit name for sobriety. (See the previous chapter for further discussion and context). This teaching was significant and gave her permission to pass tobacco to receive a sober name that will guide her during this stage in her life. Here is what she shared,

So, I decided to get another name because of her, and she said she had those ones through her sobriety and stuff like that. (A3)

For a number of the women, they experienced a very beautiful connection between the Full Moon and the sweat lodge. We are compartmentalized in the western world - we categorize stages of healing, we measure success, and we monitor shifts and movements within the people we are working with to see progressions of healing. We use theory, and tools that are placed on our invisible social work belt to work with, but what is left out is the spirit world as a tool when working with Indigenous people. Categorizing healing is not wholistic, it is ongoing,

and the spirit world interconnected like the roots of the tree of life. Because of these connections, all aspects of healing, especially when related to spirituality, cannot be measured in the western sense with scales and assessments. Through the voices of the women, I captured how the Full Moon and the sweat lodge worked together to help them continue their healing.

One of the women in the Full Moon asked for strength that night; she was the one that talked about her partner overdosing and how she supports so many people. While she was in the sweat lodge all that strength, she asked for came out, here is what she shared regarding her experience,

I cried a lot in there, because I wanted to just leave some of the stuff that I'd been dragging there, and yeah, I couldn't stop crying, and I actually found myself to the point where I had to hang onto the lodge. I had to hold the trees inside the lodge while it was going on. I didn't think I was going to make it and I've made it through ones that are 75 grandfathers. And for some reason, this was the [hardest] one of all. I think it's because I had gone there for healing and I was fighting my own healing. I make up excuses for the people I love around me. "Oh, no, no, they couldn't do it today. They just didn't feel like themselves. They have a lot of trauma." ...I got really sick after that lodge...it started with the headache...And, I think it was just ... there was so much garbage inside of me and I had to let it all out, that my mind and my body didn't know what to do...But, as the days went on, I started to get better and I found that I had more patience. I'm finding that the little things aren't ...bothering me as much anymore. (A11)

On the night of the Full Moon, Grandmother Moon heard her prayers, and in the sweat lodge, she continued to work with her along with Creator and her spirit helpers. The headache that she spoke about is not uncommon when accessing the sweat lodge for healing. The sweat

that comes from the pores releases toxins, but the spiritual toxins that we carry also need a way to be released. Another woman shared a similar experience with the connection between the two ceremonies. On the night of the Full Moon, she asked Grandmother Moon to take some of her strength,

I am the only woman in my house full of boys, I carry a lot. I just need to not carry anything, I want to release this and be at peace. I am always fighting something in my head, I just need to go with the flow. Sometimes I take pride in how much I can handle or carry, it reminds me of how strong I really am, but sometimes I just don't want to be that strong. I need to step back and do something for myself. (A18)

One month later she was asked if there was a connection between her prayers for Grandmother Moon, and being in the sweat lodge her response was as follow,

Yeah, a huge connection...Then going to this sweat and having Ed... When he specifically said, "Do not ask for strength because then you're going to ask for more problems and more weight on you." I never thought of it that way. It was funny...I can't remember what round it was. I gave thanks for my strength...When he said that afterwards, I was like, "Damn, okay. Well, I'm glad I already...gave acknowledgement to my strength within that sweat. When he said not to ask for strength, it meant something...I was like, "Perfect." I was like, "I'm not going to because I got enough."
(A18)

For another woman in this study on the night of the Full Moon ceremony this was what she asked for from Grandmother Moon,

I have conflict in my life that doesn't keep my mind at ease. I want her to help me, that I do not come off as passive or aggressive. I need patience, I need guidance. (A13)

The guidance and patience she asked for came in the form of a vision she experienced in the sweat lodge. Above she shared about her vision of the red eagle, and how this vision is guiding her. When we work from a spiritual place, the healing components are endless and often cannot be measured or viewed through a western lens. Both ceremonies capture a glimpse into this connection of how Indigenous ceremonies and teachings work together in a symbiotic relationship that is not controlled by a social worker. Instead, it is all controlled through Creator, his civil servant, and the spirits that help us along our healing path.

Healing from an Indigenous perspective. The ribbon skirt making, Full Moon and sweat lodge are only a couple of traditional teachings and ceremonies that can help in the healing of Indigenous women who experienced sexual exploitation. For half of the women in this study, this was their first-time experiencing ceremony and being part of this study not only opened this up for the women but took them to a place of wanting more in their lives as part of their healing journey. One woman shared,

I use to think like, like I knew that going to ceremonies would help me, but I didn't believe in it, you know. I didn't think that it would actually work, but now I actually believe it... This experience is really empowering me and made me feel a lot better and I want to seek out more ceremony... no matter what we face as Indigenous people, we will always [find our way out]...always (A14)

Although there may be some similarities in theories used in social work practice such as strength-based perspectives, it is essential to acknowledge that traditional healing practices and ceremonies have never been incorporated fully as a theory to healing. It is a way of life that has been here long before first contact. Ceremonies were hidden when it became illegal to practice our ways, and it emerged out of the deepest parts of the woods to now shine bright for the world

to see. Our ancestors that came before us ensured that this knowledge did not die, the healing of our people will continue, and it is ceremonies like the ones the women experienced that will help continue to heal our nations. One woman shared,

Healing looks like being connected to our ancestors, to trusting. There isn't a story they haven't heard. There isn't a cry they haven't felt. Healing is allowing yourself to be wrapped in that darkness... When you're in that sweat lodge and you're allowing that darkness to hold you, to wrap itself around you, ...When you go into that sweat lodge...you're allowing yourself to be naked in an emotional, spiritual sense. That you're allowing those things to come and you're going to put them down and your ancestors are going to take them....they're going to allow you to unburden yourself and they're going to carry those burdens for you...

Healing is subjective, and in a western setting, as mentioned earlier, must be well documented, factual, and proven to work. Healing from a traditional way of knowing and having no boundaries or limits or required to prove that a person is finding healing in their lives. Going into the Full Moon or the sweat lodge a person will not leave healed entirely, but what it does is offer the opportunity to learn how to cope with trauma, pain, identity, belonging, and rebuilding community, this is all connected to the healing journey. One woman shared,

I feel what I went to go sweat for... I'm not healed, but I've gotten my answer through teachings...I want to go again, I know that teaching is not going to linger. It's not going to linger long enough for me to wait another year to go to sweat. For me, it's going to be like, "I need to go to another sweat. My body will want to sweat"...I went to go get a teaching on how to care for myself through trauma. And I got it, I definitely got it. (A13)

Healing came from teachings given to her by the Knowledge Keepers in this study; she was able to take what stood out for her and apply it to her own life and how it fits into her concept of healing. She defines her path to healing and how she will carry these teachings moving forward. In social work practice, it is very important to give people the space to define how they want to be helped and walk with them in a way that leaves them in full control over their lives and the direction they take it. Another woman shared,

I'm still healing, but I've started to really learn how I'm very self-aware. I know what I need when I need it. (A18)

Healing also does not have to be done in isolation. Community and interpersonal relationships are other aspects of healing identified by some of the women in this study. The relationships developed between the women build on the natural connection to one another. One woman shared,

Sometimes that community, whether you're in a sweat lodge with people you know or you don't know, you're all there for a purpose and you're all there for a reason... What that reason is, is for whatever it turns out to be because maybe that's you're community. Maybe those are your brothers and sisters that your ancestors have brought to you because you needed them and they needed you. There's purpose and that's a part of that healing process as well. (A1)

For the women that were able to participate in the sweat lodge, they all identified that there was a feeling of being able to let go of what they were carrying. One woman shared,

When you leave that sweat lodge, you feel so light. You do. You physically feel light like you left it there. That's healing. That's all part of the healing process... (A1)

One of the women shared what she saw when the women came out of the sweat lodge,

...Everybody that was there, when we came out of there, they looked different. It was lighter. (A11)

Another woman shared how the feeling she had when she left the sweat lodge carried her for the rest of the week and provoked further thought into her healing moving forward through self-reflection,

...after that weekend I felt so good. I was like wow. I felt so good all week and it's really good. And now we're going to do another sweat so it's going to continue to feel good... I feel so much better. Maybe if I had that at that moment in my life, I probably wouldn't have slipped up. I don't know, I can't say for sure. Right? But maybe if it was right then, there when all this shit happened maybe it would have been a little bit different. (A3)

For two of the women in this study that were not able to attend the sweat lodge gathering, they were asked how previous access to the sweat lodge had helped them in their own healing.

One woman shared what her experience was

I loved it...When I got out I was like, "Holy crap." I felt like a new person, and I let go of so much that I needed to, and I prayed...I think it's very important. It cleanses, it feels like it cleanses all of the bad energy and, I don't know, just how you're feeling about yourself, and life, and stuff... I feel so much lighter when I come out of the sweat [lodge]. (A2)

The other woman in this study who could not participate in this day had recently gone into a sweat lodge in the community that was specifically for women who are experiential or still involved in the sex industry. At the time of this study, she was trying to find a balance between working frontline with women who are sexually exploited and her personal healing. When asked how the sweat lodge helped her regain this balance, she shared the following,

I Remember going into this one sweat lodge and I was crying. And I was just saying, I had to forgive myself. I had to forgive myself and everybody else. I had to, forgiveness was huge for me. I remember when I came out of that sweat lodge. That's where I cried for. I just cried and I prayed for forgiveness. Forgiveness, forgiveness, when I came out of that lodge I just felt like everything was taken from me. The next day, I woke up and I woke up such in a good mood and I was just like, I felt so light on my feet. That's why, I didn't feel stuck anymore. I was able to move forward and do that healing for myself. I had to forgive myself before I could move forward to do that healing, right? (A5)

For the women in this study, they were able to identify what healing looks like for them. It was their ancestors, knowledge keepers, relationships amongst the women, community, reclaiming identity, belonging, connection to the land and spirit, combined with working from a place within traditional Indigenous teachings and ceremonies all contributed to their healing journeys. To be free and unshackled from their experiences of being sexually exploited is to be free from the colonial chains that served only to perpetuate this form of gender-based violence.

Sending a Message

During the interviews the women were asked to reflect on their experiences, and if they could send a message to their younger and future self, what they would say. The information was gathered through the one-to-one interviews attained after the completion of the gatherings, however the information shared by the participants were not analyzed.

In therapeutic settings within social work practice, many understand the importance of having individuals look into their past as a way to understand their present state, and to create an opportunity to move forward. Don Robinson (in Rowe, 2012) is a Cree Elder and social worker who uses this approach in working with the community through a decolonized approach to social

work practice. He explains in Cree, two ways to tap into the consciousness of the people that honors the past present and future of an individual. "*Mamitoney ni ta*" which means really think about your life and *Mamitoney nihta mowin*" which means thinking deeply about your life." (p.3-4)

Thinking about how you got to where you are because of your past, whether it is trauma, addictions, or depression, you have deconstructed your past in order to make a new life.

"They have to reclaim their consciousness...people have to be aware of their power, they have power; emotional; mental power, physical power and spiritual power. When a person realizes their power of *ti pe ni mi sowin* (Cree word for self-determination) (Robinson in Rowe, 2017, p, 3-4).

Two questions that were asked for the women in this study to have them really think about their life, and to go further and think deeply about who they were as strong Indigenous women. The two questions asked were, one, if you could send a message to yourself when you were younger, around the time when you first experienced sexual exploitation, what would you want to say to her? And two, if you could send a message to yourself in five years, what would you say to her? The responses of the women when asked to send a message to their younger self varied, however the common thread that connected the women to one another was needing to belong. This section is not intended to analyze their responses. This section is important to allow the women to speak freely, to share their message in a respectful way that truly centers and honors their voices. When asked the first question, here is what all 10 women shared,

What would I want her to know? That's a really tough question. You know it's funny because I think about, what would I tell our youth? Find somebody you trust. Find somebody who gives a shit about you enough to check on you. Find your person because

they're out there. It's an adult person. It's an adult person who's going to love you beyond all your flaws and is going to love the broken pieces, the put together pieces, find that person because that person is going to keep you safe and is going to check on you when you're going astray. It might be a teacher. It might be a counselor. It might be a friend's mom. Find that person. That would be my... That's what I tell our girls. Find your safe person. They are out there. (A1)

You belong. You're not different. You belong. That one. And, money is not what you think it is... (A11)

I would have told her, "You don't have to do this. And your mom's waiting at home for you. This girl doesn't care for you. This guy gave you Chlamydia." I would be telling myself these things. "There's a reason why you can't take him home. His girlfriend fights you." I would be saying these things. I would send myself these messages to say those things. And I'd be like, "This is illegal." I don't even know if I would have done it if I knew it was illegal. And I'd be like...you know what's going happen, you're going to cry, you're going to do a blow job, or you're going to have sex in the car, or at someone's house. And then they're going to make you walk home, or you're just going to walk home, and you're going to get yourself so drunk, that you're going to end up back in the youth center. Or you don't have to go face your mom. (A13)

I'd tell her that there is hope now. You'll get through. You'll get through it...stay strong, and pray, and get to ceremony...I wish somebody would have...held my hand and been like, "Come on." You know? I wish I had somebody like that, like a mentor. You know? Somebody like that. (A14)

We'll be okay. Just kidding. I don't know. I don't know. I just, I always feel that I always knew I was doing what I'm supposed to be doing anyways, even being in that field, right. Maybe there's a reason why I went through that. There's a reason that I learnt my battles and stuff like that. I really, I almost... I don't know. I almost don't think that there was a message to be told because I was carrying the message with me the whole time. (A18)

Don't be afraid, because I was scared for so many years and I've held myself back from learning my culture and the ways for such a long time. It's almost to the point where I was so upset with my grandmother...I feel like I hate her at that time, but now I can understand what we were saying earlier, that she's not coming from a place to try and hurt you, but to protect you. So I understood that about like a week later, I'm like, "Hey, this is not why she did this, it's because she wanted to protect me, because she was taught that it was a bad thing." (A2)

That's funny, my counselor asked me to write myself a letter, when I was this age. And I still never did it. I wrote a couple of lines, yeah, I threw my book down. Like this is fucking difficult. What do I say? But I don't know. Maybe I would just let her know that, this is going to shape you. This is going to make you who you are in the next 10 years. You are going to get through it. You're strong, you're going to do it. And god or Creator is going to give you nothing you can't handle. That's one of my favorite quotes. I found it somewhere. I think that's what I'd tell her (A3)

I don't know. I thought about that once too. I don't know, Not to run. I used to run a lot. You did it, you made it, you made it far. I didn't think I would be here today, I would have been murdered...(A4)

That it's not your fault. That you're loved. (A5)

I don't know what I would say. I don't know. I don't think I would really say anything. I think, maybe just a big hug. A really big hug, a comforting hug. (A9)

When the women were asked what message, they would send into their future, their whole being changed, their faces lit up, smiles shared, and feelings of being proud of how far they have come trickled in the space. Thinking deeply about where they were headed despite the obstacles that have been in their way, their messages were filled with strength and pride. Here are what the women shared,

You're fucking amazing. My gosh, through all the shit you've been through, you're still standing. Despite all the odds, you have a degree. You have kind children. You have become a lighthouse for so many people in their own journey. Don't stop. Don't stop. Continue to be the light. (A1)

Hopefully, I'll be in a place where I can get to them before ... that this is probably, next to having my children, this is probably the most important thing I ever did. No, I would tell myself that these last six years have probably been the most important thing I could've done for myself and my life, was to reconnect with ceremony. Keep pushing forward. Try to get to them before it happens, and let's get the little girls all together and teach them one, about the beginning and what our positions were in the beginning. That's so important that we teach them that you are so valued. (A11)

I would say, "You made it. You are so brilliant, that it wasn't only for yourself that you did it for. You stayed out of the sex trade for a reason. And that was for [her child]. I am so proud of you that you have done it and kept [her child] away from high risk, like

people that have hurt me." And like say you bought a house, I'd be like, "Oh wow, look at this house. Look at [her child] laugh. Look at this stuff that you can still provide. Look at those times you still provided. And not really argumentative, but put up good, assertive comments to make sure that you were eligible to always go to those visits." And that's exactly what I would say. (A13)

Just keep on, grab still, and stay strong. Your life is good, and it's getting better. I don't know. I have goals so... And one of them is to go into a social work program. So eventually I'll be there. Hopefully I will be in that. Yes, I will be. (A14)

Go get it. Listen to yourself. You've been doing what you're supposed to be doing this whole time. Do not fucking go off track, man. You know what I mean? If there's something that just, you know it's not right, don't be scared of it. Address it... Move forward. Keep going. My goal in the end, just to be happy, and engaging in those ceremonies. I want to be that mom where it's like, "Let's go. Let's pack up in the bag." (A18)

I'm proud of you, I would say, because I'm not going to stop doing what I'm doing, I'm going to learn my culture, to stay sober, to stop doing sexual exploitation. I have stopped, it's just that some of them are my friends now that have helped me through the years, so yeah, I don't actively do that. (A2)

Look at you girl, you never thought you'd get through this, you got it. You're fucking doing it. Hopefully in five years I'll be done everything I want to do, so (A3)

What the hell were you thinking? That you got this, and you've had this all the time.

There are just days where I'm like, oh my God, can I do this? Do I have the ability? Do I have the strength? And I smudge and I tell myself, I can do this, I got this. Just because you haven't been entrenched or engaging in addiction for a period of time doesn't mean that you don't still have those self-doubt and that self... Your confidence is now at a different level. You still feel sometimes defeated, I guess that's the word. Sometimes you feel defeated even knowing you're not. (A5)

I don't know, to be honest. (A9)

As each woman shred their message, every single one expressed such powerful words, but the emotions that filled the room and spaces could not be captured within this study. As the researcher, it was a very humbling experience to share in this moment with the women as they thought deeply about their past, thought deeply about that young girl that was vulnerable, and sent messages of hope into their future self with the intentions that one day this message will be received where they continue to find *Ti pe ni mi sowin*.

Chapter 6 - Recommendations for Policy, Practice and Research

The recommendations for policy, social work practice and research offered are only a starting point to look at the importance of culture and returning to traditional customs and knowledges that have been echoed through the women's voices within this study. These recommendations offer perspectives in moving forward as it relates to policy development, social work practice and ongoing research that is required to better understand how traditional healing practices can address the needs of Indigenous women who experienced sexual exploitation in Canada.

Policy Recommendations

Decolonization. Indigenous people around the world have been disempowered through policies, laws, racism and discrimination from micro to macro levels in colonized societies (Mahuika, 2008; Hart, Straka, & Rowe, 2017). Reconciliation from the Canadian government for the damages that have been enacted on Indigenous peoples through cultural genocide is an ongoing process. The colonization of Indigenous women's bodies is still prevalent in current policies and laws that create and sustain the ongoing sexual exploitation of Indigenous women. There is a literature that acknowledges the colonial connection at a political level, however governments that shape policies continue to deny this historical concept that sexual exploitation was and is perpetuated by the colonial state. Decolonization approaches are required to address the dominant system, its treatment, and historical restriction imposed upon Indigenous people around the world. Yellow Bird, Coates, and Gray (2013) explain that decolonization is about acknowledging that Indigenous people have the answers to solve the problems that are imbedded within their community. These solutions are found in traditional knowledges and healing practices have been used for thousands of years, and that the solution is found within the people.

However, colonization is still prevalent in Canada, governments have yet to acknowledge this connection or properly fund any decolonizing programs or policies that truly benefit Indigenous people. This reaction is due to the perceived to the capitalist system. Until decolonization is adequately addressed at a political and policy level, Indigenous women who are trying to exit the sex industry will continue to fall through the cracks (Corntassel, 2012),

...I hear after five months of hearing that there is a lot of cultural services. But when you go to get the cultural services, they're not there. So I think there's a lot of talk of non-Indigenous community members or the government...implementing these current services... They're not there. (A4)

Despite policies created to help address the sexual exploitation of Indigenous women that differ from province to province, the fact is, the numbers are only increasing, and the problems are not being solved by programs that do not reflect the needs of Indigenous women. One woman shared,

I have participated in some of their Indigenous programs. They're cookie cutter programs. There's not a lot of heart...And, that's not what needs to be given to us women that are exiting. Yeah, it's something, but handing out condoms and clean needles...it's not solving the goddamn problem either. And that's what these organizations were built for, emergency help. There are good people in there, but there's not enough Indigenous programs.

In order to move forward and find true meaning in addressing the colonial issues connected to Indigenous women's over representation in sexual exploitation, it is the women who experienced this first hand that need to be at the fore front of having policies created and developed for them. Hart (2009) argues that anti-colonialism is complex and must address and

“de-legitimize” political, historical, social, and economic structures rooted in Eurocentric ideology. He asserts that anti-colonialism seeks to reaffirm Indigenous knowledge and culture, establish Indigenous control over Indigenous national territories, protect Indigenous lands from environmental destruction and develop education opportunities that are anti colonial in their political orientation and firmly rooted in traditions of Indigenous nations. (In Yellow Bird, et al., p. 32)

Survivor engagement policies. Create responsible survivor engagement policies and protocols that take into consideration the impacts of vicarious trauma on complex trauma survivors who are working in the field of their trauma and recognizes that the recovery of survivors is ongoing even when working within their profession.

Inclusivity. Indigenous women and GLBQT2 voices have been left out of the political movement of addressing Indigenous rights. Therefore, inclusivity is paramount in the development of such policies. This also requires Indigenous women and men and allies to stand beside our brothers and sisters and be a voice with and for them to ensure they are not left without a space in political standings, and agendas.

Employing the experts. Experiential women are the experts in the area of sexual exploitation. They know what is working and not working in their communities. They need to be at the forefront of the development of such policies and hired in government to ensure that these programs developed at a political level are well funded and are meeting the cultural needs of the community. One woman shared,

We need to meet our women where they're at. Again, when they need that help and when they want that help. That help should be available to them. That's a big aspect for social workers to know or government. We need more funding so we could put those resources

in place. There's not enough funding they just keep cutting, cutting, cutting. And wonder why we're going through the crisis we go through. (A5)

Programs that are Indigenous lead and run are vital to Indigenous women to reconnect back to the land, identity, and traditional knowledges and ceremonies that aid in the healing process. Programs that are run and operated by Indigenous communities require proper funding and ongoing supports.

Social Work Practice Recommendations

Change in social work training. Social workers who spent years in universities being taught western ways of working with Indigenous people, have become a part of the neocolonial tactics that continue to impact Indigenous communities (Adams, 1999; Atleo, 2008; Gray, Coates, Yellow bird and Hetherington, 2013). It is important for social workers who are working with Indigenous people/community to be able to understand how neocolonialism works, and to question their own state dependency as it relates to neoliberalism. Social work education is predominantly based on western ideology that peers through a Eurocentric lens when working with Indigenous people (Hart, 2010). Until Universities become embedded in Indigenous ways of knowing as the praxis of the work needing to be done, (somewhat like the MSW-IK program), social work will continue to oppress and marginalize Indigenous people (Gray et al., 2013; Adams, 1999). This can be problematic because Indigenous worldviews and perspectives differ in thought processes and the way in which problems are solved that go against everything that mainstream social work practice teaches students within the institutions (Yellow Bird et al., 2013). Social work education requires decolonizing the practice and theories that contradict Indigenous world views. It must create the space for Indigenous scholars and educators to

develop and implement their own ways of helping and to be taught to honor the differences between both worlds (Yellow Bird et al., 2013).

Decolonizing social work practice and theory. Indigenous world views, in comparison to western theories and ideologies are commonly perceived as inferior and therefore becomes further marginalized within the systems that teach social work practice and theory (Hart, 2010). Attempts made within universities to be more inclusive can be seen in cross cultural perspectives and person-in-environment practice theory that appear to be more holistic and culturally inclusive. However, these theories still do not capture the unique world views that are imbedded within Indigenous knowledges and appreciate the uniqueness that is found in every single tribe across Canada (Yellow Bird et al., 2013). Theories cannot simply be mentioned and then applied straight across the Indigenous spectrum. This has happened for too long, the Indigenous voice is completely left out and you have the dominant system once again making assumptions on how to work with Indigenous people (Yellow Bird et al., 2013). The theories that are created and implemented as tools to help the other, are created and taught by the dominant western systems that continue to ignore the importance of acknowledging and implementing Indigenous world views as valid and true (Yellow Bird et al., 2013).

Gray and colleagues (2013) stated that social work can in fact become Indigenized through theory (culturally grounded in their work), practice (being in community, grassroots organizations), education (Universities being more inclusive of Indigenous social work), and research (non-indigenous challenging colonial practice/ having Indigenous researchers doing the research). Decolonizing social work from colonial and post-colonial frameworks support reconnection to Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, not only in an academic discourse, but also, in the context of lived experiences, in the way we interact with and relate to

all living things and the cosmos (Absolon, 2010; Sinclair, 2004;). Yellow Bird and colleagues (2013) state, “Decolonizing Social Work allows for the acknowledgement and incorporation of the strengths of Indigenous communities rather than a perpetuation of blaming-the-victim approaches compounding the adverse effects of several hundred years of colonial projects” (p.7). Indigenous people carry the knowledge that is required to decolonize social work practice, however until the universities truly embrace Indigenous world views and foster the relationship that is required to do such work, the ongoing colonization of Indigenous people will continue to take place in such institutions.

Social work practice. During the one-to-one interviews that were conducted with the women in this study, they had a lot to say regarding what they need, not only from social workers, and Elders/Knowledge Keepers to community programs. The following recommendations come directly from the women and it was extremely important that they shape this section. Some of what is shared is very straight forward and it is not meant to offend anyone, but it is important to understand they are the experts of their own experiences and the many experiences shared within their community. This section is intended to make social workers and those in the helping profession take a step back and truly reflect on how working with our survivor women, our warrior women could be done through Indigenous world views.

Non-judgmental social work practice. The ongoing judgments that are evident in our communities towards women who experience sexual exploitation, only serve to perpetuate the disenfranchisement of our women that leaves them voiceless (Razack, 2000). With universities teaching social workers that colonization is the root of the over representation of Indigenous women in sexual exploitation, human trafficking and the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), there is opportunity to meet the women where they are and honor

their roles and contributions in their communities. One woman shared how she felt when asked what she wanted social workers to know about working with women who are trying to leave sex industry and remain sober from illicit substance use,

They're not going to listen anyways...I don't know what I'd tell them. I really don't, because they're just going to say what they think you should do anyways. Because they never listen. (A3)

Yellow Bird et al., (2013) states, "Indigenous forms of healing and helping are more likely to be compatible with Indigenous Peoples' values and worldviews because they are culturally grounded or situated within Indigenous Peoples' own cultural traditions" (p. 8). Indigenous women who experienced sexual exploitation have the answers, they know what they need, and how social workers can be helpful in their healing journeys. It is important to create a space for their voices to be heard and listened to. One woman shared the importance of social workers, Elders/Knowledge Keepers and other front-line workers to be non-judgmental, and offered insight on the importance of their roles through an Indigenous world view,

These people are someone's mothers, someone's grandmothers, someone's daughters. Sons even. They have names. They come from families regardless of what you think of them or their families. They're human beings. They have value. They deserve to be honored. They deserved to be loved despite their shortcomings. What I would say is that, treat them like they're your daughters. Treat them like they're your grandmothers. What would you want for them? What would you ask for them? Would you ask for them to be condemned or loved? Would you want them to be left or to be chased after? Would you want solutions or would you prefer to just turn a blind eye? It's not going away. Be their voice when they can't be a voice for themselves or when they don't know how. Raise your

hand and say, "I stand for them." Be that person that can walk beside them, not in front of them and not behind them, pushing them, but beside them, holding their hand if need be. Maybe two of you walk beside them to love on them, to give them the strength when they want to fall, pick them up. Remember... They are not faceless. They are not nameless. They are our women. We honor them. They have so much to offer our world despite the current circumstances you see them in. They are worthy and that's what I would tell them.

(A1)

Part of being non-judgmental is being open to listening with all parts of your being. In social work there is a disconnection from listening with your heart and listening with your spirit. (Hart, 2010). "Indigenous social work and traditional healing begin with a spiritual sense of interconnectedness" (Yellow Bird et al., 2013 p.9). This interconnectedness is sacred, and relationships created between the helper and the one seeking guidance should be treated as such. Turning a woman away at her most vulnerable due to preconceived notions around the sex industry creates a road block that prevents access to the ceremonies or programs that is needed to develop the skills and tools for ones healing journey. Simply put, one woman stated, "Don't judge us..." (A9). Within Indigenous world views, the sacred seven and other teachings helps to guide our way of being and how we not only treat ourselves but those around us. We need to return to these values and truly incorporate them into social work practice not just as a saying, but really walk in a way that respects and honors the spirit and life of each individual that is seeking guidance and help.

Relationships. As social workers, we must work from this place of deep understanding and appreciation for the human spirit in order to do meaningful work that will authentically help in a good way. Grounding ourselves in culture and in relationship with others roots us in the

work we need to do as social workers (Yellow Bird et al., 2013). Relationships are the key aspects to help guide the healing processes as identified by the women in this study. One woman shared,

“My therapist helps me a lot and you know, I care for her. We've built the relationship”
(A14).

However, due to lack of relationship, or relationships being severed due to turn over rates in places of employment, the women identified this having major implications on their healing. One woman shared the significance of this,

...they're not women that are just going to open up easily. Because that's how I am, that's how a lot of my friends are. And this happens all the time with youth workers leaving or their mentors, or social workers, or CFS workers or anything, with them leaving and once they build that bond with you, it's like, why am I going to do it again? So they need ... I feel like they should have a contract saying, I'm going to be here with this youth, or this person for this amount of time, or years or something...Because it's like it's constantly being let down it feels like, because that's happened to me so many times with my workers and it's like, now I have to restart over again and go through all of that, talk about all that trauma, and go through it again with another person that's just going to leave anyways. And that happens way too much. (A2)

There are many factors that come into play for social workers when leaving their places of employment, (poor work place environment, pay scale, benefits, conflict, change in management and policies, fired, laid off, or they leave for good reasons i.e. to peruse further education, etc.) for what the reason is, social workers turnover rates are present in a majority of work places. Once a person's employment stops, so does the relationships made with the people

they are working with. Policies, mandates, employment standards and even social work ethics are all western guidelines that prevent further contact with individuals they worked with. It is understood that this is not only in place to protect participants, but also social workers in these scenarios.

Programming: Ceremony and western therapies. Out of the ten women, more than half of the women only wanted access to Indigenous ceremonies and teachings, with a few feelings that they want to have access to both western therapies and traditional healing methods. For the women that did not want to use western therapies their responses were rather straight forward. One woman shared,

No. No. Because you only got an hour right, and then if you don't get to finish talking about whatever it is that you need to talk about, and then in sweat lodges, there's no time frame on it. Right? It goes for as long as you need it to go. As long as that person's talking, sweat's still on. And if you're sitting in a room, they're like, "Oh, well it's two o'clock, time's up now." And you're like, you're left with those feelings. You are. You have to deal with that shit, not them. (A3)

Another woman shared,

No. The Indigenous was way better for me. It speaks louder than words. I think anybody could, I don't know how to explain it. I've been through many treatments before and like I said, they didn't grab me but when I went to BHF [Behavioral Health Foundation] and I went to the traditional grounds it grabbed me. There's something that latched on, connected me, my spirit there. Learning with traditional and the cultural ways was always so exciting to me. It just kept me going, learning more and more about it. For me it was cultural ways that helped. (A5)

Another woman shared what the difference is for her when accessing ceremonies versus western therapies,

In the sweat lodge, I don't have to talk. I don't have to. My ancestors, my people, that are connected most to me, meet me there. They already know because they've walked with me already 1,000 times. They already know. They already know why I'm there. They already know the things that I need to let go of. They hear me when I cry. They don't have to touch my back. They don't have to tell me, "It's going to be okay." (A1)

With the resurgence that is taking place in our communities around reclaiming traditional knowledges and ceremonies, it is important to also keep in mind that not everyone wants to access Indigenous ceremonies just because this is their lineage. As social workers it is important for the individual to choose what is best for them and slowly offer both perspectives. One woman shared,

I think it would be all about each individual person. I believe that the option should be there, and I believe that they could be incorporated together healthfully. Some women are going to, or men, or two spirited people are going to need medication. They're going to need it. They have chemical imbalances. You can't get that from ... some western medicine...And, some people feel more comfortable talking, and some need to release.

They need to release that through a therapist. (A11)

Another woman shared,

Well, I think having one, the other and something in the middle would be great because then we can capture all walks of life. (A1)

Another woman also shared how important access to both traditional ceremonies and western therapies helps her,

Well, it helps me work through the things in my head and the way I'm thinking and helps me change my thinking, helps me understand why I'm feeling what I'm feeling...when I have problems ...kind of helps me to figure out how they're feeling and maybe I need to change the way I talk to them and stuff like that...think both ...To do both is a good thing, not just one...Yeah. That's how I am too with ... I believe in the creator and then God, because I am Christian and I do follow, I want to follow Christian ...Their traditional ways too. And some people look at me like whatever, whatever works for me works for me, at this point I don't even care what other people think... (A2)

When we look at decolonizing social work practice and incorporating Indigenous world views and access to traditional knowledge and ceremonies in the healing process, social work practice can still work with western therapeutic approaches. Having access to both perspectives is equally important, it creates opportunity for the individual to choose what is going to better suit their needs as they go through their healing journeys. Creating a space that offer both does not force one way over the other, but it must be centered on relationship and relationship to the spirit world to help guide your social work practice. Otherwise, we center Eurocentric therapies over Indigenous world views, thus creating an imbalance that tips towards the dominant colonial systems. There is a delicate balance and it is up to the social worker to create that balance so that those accessing services can choose to tip that scale on their own terms.

Available access to programming. All of the women in this study expressed needing and wanting a space that offered wrap around services where they could access Elders and Knowledge Keepers, social workers, experiential women to help mentor them, and programming that is geared towards rebuilding their identity as Indigenous women. What was more important to the women was that they have access to ceremonies regardless of where they were at in their

recovery. There are programs available to women who are exiting the sex industry that are doing the work in the community, however they are few and far between with only one being an Indigenous lead and run organization.

Inclusivity is a major aspect that requires consideration for all nations, all women and our LGBTQTS+ brothers and sisters. The reality is, sexual exploitation is a colonial experience that targets Indigenous women, however non-Indigenous women are often left out of programs and feel they do not have access to programs specific to their needs. When looking at the medicine wheel, we must create a safe space for all, this is our way, our customs, and belief that we have the right to be alive and come as we are, regardless of color, race, or ethnicity. More programs that are centered on Indigenous frameworks, should also be mindful of how traditional teachings and ceremonies benefit all nations. One woman shared,

“We need more centers for indigenous or non-Indigenous...” (A14).

Treatment centers. Immediate access to treatment centers and detox facilities is an ongoing problem. Many people are falling through the gap of recovery due to long wait lists, no beds available, and an overall shortage of programs across Manitoba and Canada. For women who are identifying that they need to leave the sex industry and have been using illicit substances as a way to cope, they need to have immediate access to treatment centers. I would even go as far to say that there are enough women in this situation that a program should and could be developed specifically for women who experience sexual exploitation. This treatment center would be Indigenous lead and run where long term after care is provided, or to work in partnership with existing organizations that have second stage housing. For some of the women in this study, having access to one of the rehabilitation centers that gave the option to find healing in their sobriety through Indigenous teachings and ceremonies was what she identified

was the missing piece in her own recovery,

...that's where I found my identity again... They have a traditional lodge there, they have a traditional section there. They have sweat lodges, they had full moon ceremonies, they have an Elder ready on site. That's where I was able to regain my strength in treatment. Because I've gone through other different treatments before and it was, as soon as I would get out, I'd go right back to the streets or else I would just leave. But this time...I connected with ceremony right away. I was able to open up, talk, feed my spirit and I think that's what kept me there was finding that balance and my spirit. Which I wasn't able to do at any of the other treatment centers (A5)

Indigenous research. Indigenous research is a new terrain with as few as “1% of scholars” writing from Indigenous perspectives (Hart, Straka & Rowe, 2017). There is a need for more Indigenous researchers to conduct their own research to breakdown the colonial ties that are present in all institutions and governments. That research focuses on a culturally reflective approach that honors the space in which knowledge is gained through the land, ceremony, and ways of seeing the world (Hart et al., 2017; Simpson, 2004; Mahuika, 2008). Traditionally, research done on Indigenous people have been exploitive, unethical and served to maintain the dominant system and status quo where more harm is done rather than help (Hart et al, 2017; Mahuika, 2008; Simpson, 2004). Hart et al (2017), supports this by also adding that Indigenous research is viewed as the bottom of the barrel of research due to the lack of science and proof. As a result, the action required to do anti-colonial work resides in restoring traditions, land, protecting Indigenous lands, environmental destruction, educational opportunities, and challenging colonial politics that continue to keep a nation voiceless (Simpson, 2004). Hart et al (2017), acknowledges the benefits of working in partnership so that both Indigenous and non-

Indigenous people can transform and decolonize research, however it demands that non-Indigenous people serve to challenge the dominant systems by acknowledging their own privilege” (Hart et al, 2017; Simpson, 2004).

Intervention and prevention research. More research is needed on the benefits of traditional healing as interventions, we do not need anymore research done on Indigenous women who experienced sexual exploitation that focuses on the trauma, this does not solve the problem, and therefore, research moving forward must be solution focused, show exactly how governments, social workers, helpers, Elders, and knowledge Keepers are more than capable of implementing programs that center Indigenous knowledges and epistememes in a respectful way.

More Indigenous research is required when developing interventions to sexual exploitation so that the focus can be solution orientated. It will allow for the women who are experiential to shape the way in which programs are run and developed. Allow Indigenous research and the researcher to tap into a place where spirit and Creator helps guide the process. Allow Elders and Knowledge Keepers to bring forth these solutions to help shape intervention and prevention programs that brings Indigenous knowledges to a sacred place.

Lastly, research is required to better understand the motives of perpetrators who purchase sex, and traffickers who target victims. Not enough information is available, and to only focus on the women in research as victims, a void is created that still serves to protect men who continue to perpetuate this form of gender-based violence.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Script

Study Title: Mookii Mikinak: A traditional road to healing for Indigenous women who experienced sexual exploitation

First Contact Script for Interview (Telephone or In-Person)

Researcher: Tammy Nelson

Hello, my name is Tammy Nelson. I am a student in the Master of Social Work based in Indigenous Knowledges Program working on a research study for my thesis at the University of Manitoba. I am conducting a study on how Indigenous teachings and ceremony can potentially help with the healing of sexually exploited women. This study will contribute to knowledge about traditional Indigenous healing practices and cultural connections in Indigenous communities.

I am hoping to meet with you to discuss the possibility of participating in this research study. I would like to provide you with information about the study, questions I will be asking and consent forms for participation in the study. If you have any questions, I can answer any questions you might have.

Participants will take part in a total of four days during the research with an optional half day to make a ribbon skirt that can be used for ceremony if they choose. Two half days will be at the opening and ending of the research where a pipe ceremony and feast will take place to honor the women and their time committed to the research. The time allotted to each half day is approximately 3 hours, totaling 6 hours for both days combined. The optional day will be for participants to make a ribbon skirt that will take approximately 4 hours. The two-day project where the focus will be introducing Indigenous women to Indigenous ceremony and teachings will take place on separate days where participation is required. The Full Moon ceremony will last approximately 6 hours and can take place in early spring. The building of the sweat lodge will take place in the early spring, approximately May. This time frame was provided by Cree knowledge keeper, Ed Azure where it was explained that when Mother Earth signifies to us the land is ready, the buds on the trees will start to emerge, and that this will be the time to take the women onto the land to build the sweat lodge. The time frame for this will be approximately 8 hours, with a combined total of 20 hours

commitment from the participants. If participants chose to participate in the skirt making the time commitment would be a total of 24 hours.

I would also like to share with you it is a possibility that you may feel triggered about some of the things you will discuss during the interview sessions due to the sensitive nature of the questions. If you are uncomfortable by the interview a list of available resources or cultural supports will be provided if you desire.

Can we arrange a date, time, and location to discuss the possibility of participating in this research study?

If Yes:

When is a convenient time to meet?

Offer the forms and research study information by hand or alternative option (eg. email or by receptionist at community organizations).

If No:

Thank you for your time and consideration of this research study.

Researcher Supervisor:

Mary Kate Dennis

Faculty of Social Work

University of Manitoba

William Norrie Centre

██████████

████████████████████



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Appendix B: Second Level Screening Tool for Potential Participants

To be administered via phone call or in person to answer any potential questions.

Date: _____

Participant Alphanumeric Code: _____

Best way to contact you (phone/email): _____

Age: _____

How do you identify your gender? _____

The following information is to ensure that participants involved in the research are in a place where they are on their own healing journey. This is due to safety as some of the information learned through the course of the research may trigger participants.

Please circle your answer or fill in the blanks to the following questions:

1. Do you meet the criteria?

Yes or No

2. Have you had previous experiences in the sex industry? (street/online sex trade, massage parlors, pornography, exotic dancing, or experienced forms human trafficking)

Yes or No

3. How old were you when you first experienced being sexually exploited?

Age: _____

4. How old were you when you were able to leave the sex industry

5. Age: _____

6. If you used substances, how long have you been sober? _____

7. Do you have supports in place to help you through difficult times? Yes or No

8. Are they available to you anytime? Yes or No

9. Have you ever participated or attended Indigenous ceremonies? (if yes, please provide brief description below)

10. Would you be willing to participate in teachings, and ceremony during this research?

Yes or No

11. What days work best for you, (Daytime, evening, weekends, other)?

12. Can you commit to 6 sessions, plus one final interview equaling a total of 7 days?

Yes or No

13. Do you have any food allergies or food restrictions, or accessibility accommodations: (If yes, please explain)?

14. Would you require bus tickets?

Yes or No



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Appendix C: Survey Questionnaire

Participant Alphanumeric Code: _____

Age: _____

Gender: M/F/QT2S (Pleaser circle one that applies)

- 1. Is it important to you to participate in ceremony on your healing journey?
(Please provide description below).

- 2. Have you attended Ceremonies (Sweat Lodge, Full Moon, Water Ceremony, Pipe Ceremony, Sundance ect/Other? (Please provide description below)

- 3. If yes to attending Ceremonies, how has this helped you on your healing journey?
(Please provide description below)

- 4. Do you have access to an Elder, or individual that carries Indigenous knowledge? (if yes, please share your experience, was this helpful? (Please provide information below)

- 15. Please name the programs you accessed to help you on your healing journey?

- 5. Which programs were identified as Indigenous programs, please provide brief description of what they offered (therapy, drum groups, Sweat lodges, Full Moon, Water/pipe ceremonies, other). (Please provide description below)

- 6. How important is it for you to be provided access to cultural teachings in your healing journey? (Please provide description below)

- 7. What do you feel is a barrier for Indigenous women looking to leave the sex industry? (Please provide description below)

8. What is your knowledge around how colonization has affected Indigenous women? (Please provide description below)



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Appendix D: Talking Circles Questions

1. How was this experience for you?
2. How do you feel this can help with healing?



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Appendix E: Interview Protocol

1. Did you grow up with family members that participated in Indigenous cultural traditions?
 - a. If no, do you feel having access to ceremonies at a younger age would have made a difference for you?
 - b. If yes, please share what this was, and what it meant to you?
2. If you made a ribbon skirt, how was your experience in making the ribbon skirt?
3. How was the experience for you in participating in the Full Moon ceremony?
4. What was the most significant experience you had during the Full Moon Ceremony?
5. How was the experience in building the sweat lodge?
6. What was the most significant experience you had when participating in the building of the sweat lodge?
7. When participating in the sweat lodge, how was this experience for you?
8. What was most significant for you in participating in the sweat lodge?
9. Out of the two ceremonies, which one stood out for you the most?
 - a. Why?
10. Would you consider continuing to attend these ceremonies if given the opportunity?
11. How important is ceremony to you?

12. Do you feel ceremony has a place in your life for healing? If yes or no, please explain further

13. How was it having access to the knowledge keepers during the course of this research?

14. Do you feel more programs that help women and youth exit the sex industry should provide more access to traditional teachings?

15. Is there anything you would like to add?



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Appendix F: List of Available Support Resources

Province-Wide Crisis Lines

Klinic Crisis Line

204-786-8686 or 1-888-322-3019

TTY 204-784-4097

Manitoba Suicide Line "Reason to Live"

1-877-435-7170 (1-877-HELP170)

Manitoba Farm, Rural & Northern Support Services

supportline.ca - online counselling

1-866-367-3276 (hours Mon-Fri 10 am to 9 pm)

First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line

1-855-242-3310

Counselling available in English and French - upon request, in Cree, Ojibway, and Inuktitut

Non-Crisis Mental Health Supports

For Thompson

Thompson Community Mental Health Intake

204-677-5358 (Hours: M-F 8:30 am -4:30 pm)

For Winnipeg

WHRA COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Intake line - (204) 788-8330

Other Counselling Supports

For Winnipeg

Klinik Community Health

870 Portage Avenue Winnipeg

Community Drop-In Counselling hours

Monday, Friday, Saturday Noon-4PM

Tuesday and Thursday Noon-7PM

Aboriginal Health and Wellness/Clinic 215-181 Higgins Avenue

Winnipeg, MB

R3B 3G1

Telephone: 204-925-3700

e-mail: reception@ahwc.ca

Community Resources

Dream Catchers (KLINIC)

870 Portage Avenue

Winnipeg, Manitoba

Phone: (204) 784-4090

Dream Catchers is a program for women and transgender individuals transitioning from the sex trade, providing a safe and supportive place to start your healing journey. Weekly support groups are confidential and private.

Sage House:

422 Dufferin Avenue

Winnipeg, Manitoba

Phone: 204-943-6379

Sage House is a program for women, including transgender women who are street-involved and or in the sex trade. Sage House is a street women's health, outreach, and resource centre that delivers services to women involved in the survival of sex work

Drop In Hours:

Monday 1-5PM

Tuesday 1-6PM

Wednesday 1-5PM

Thursday 1-5 PM

Friday 1-9PM

New Directions: Transition Education Resource for Females (TERF)

717 Portage Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Phone: 204-786-7051

TERF is a transition and healing program for children, youth, adults and transgender individuals who have been exploited through the sex trade (prostitution). TERF assists to stabilize living situations, promote healthy lifestyles and build confidence and self-esteem.

- Adult Program – ages 18 and up

Ma Mawi Itch it tata Center 24/7 Out Reach

Phone: 204-951-6781 or 204-951-6791

Outreach services for street-involved individuals (cisgender, transgender)

Services include harm reduction kits, safe rides, provide warm clothing, food, and aid in making referrals for housing or a safe place. Outreach workers are available to assist with crisis situations and are there to support and build relationships in a supportive way.

At 800 Selkirk Avenue, programming around life skills, traditional teachings and ceremonies are provided for those interested.

Rainbow Resource Center

170 Scott Street

Winnipeg, Manitoba

Phone: 204-474-0212

Rainbow Resource Centre (RRC) offers support to the LGBT2SQ+ community in the form of counselling, education, and programming for individuals ranging from children through to 55±. It also supports families, friends, and employers of LGBT2SQ+ individuals

Legal Services

The following resources are available in the event you would like to proceed with providing a disclosure regarding sexual exploitation or historical childhood sexual abuse. Please note that as adults over the age of 18, it is your decision if you choose to make a statement or take legal action. There is no statute of limitation (does not matter how long ago or how old you were when the abuse took place) you have the legal right to proceed with pressing charges.

Winnipeg Police Counter Exploitation Unit

204-986-3464

The Counter Exploitation Unit is part of the Winnipeg Police Services Specialized Investigation Division. One of our priorities is the safety and wellbeing of those involved in sex trade, whether directly or indirectly.

WPS are responsible for investigations such as:

- Human Trafficking
- Street Prostitution
- Escorts and Massage Parlours

All Nations Coordinated Response Network (ANCR) Central Intake for Child and Family Services

835 Portage Avenue

Winnipeg, Manitoba

Phone: 204-944-4200

In the event that you were sexually exploited under the age of 18 and can recall who the alleged offender was, you could make a report to CFS where staff will determine whether the case should be investigated and whether the case should be investigated and whether any children may be at risk.



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Appendix G: Consent Form

Study Title: Mookii Mikinak: A traditional road to healing for Indigenous women who experienced sexual exploitation

Researcher: Tammy Nelson, thesis research (Principal Investigator)

Master of Social Work based in Indigenous Knowledges Program

University of Manitoba

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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.

Purpose

The purpose of my research is to create a better understand of how returning to Indigenous ways of knowing and ceremony can potentially help Indigenous women in their own healing journeys that have experienced sexually exploitation.

Indigenous women and youth are highly over-represented in violent crimes, sexual exploitation, and the murdered and missing women in Canada. The current problems Indigenous women and youth face stem

from colonization, residential school systems, family breakdown, and loss of traditional knowledges and ceremony. The purpose of this research project is to gain further understanding of the complexities involved in healing, and to gain further insight on how traditional Indigenous cultural practices that are conducted for healing purposes can help in one's own healing journey.

I will provide a brief screening tool to gather information on the participants to ensure that they meet the recruitment criteria and that they are a good fit for the participation in ceremonial activities. Once selected, participants will take part in research activities totaling the time commitment to four days with an optional half day to make a ribbon skirt that they can use for ceremony if they choose. Two half days will be at the opening and ending of the research where a pipe ceremony and feast will take place to honour the women and their time committed to the research. The time allotted to each half day is approximately 3 hours, totaling 6 hours for both days combined. The optional day will be for participants to make a ribbon skirt that will take approximately 4 hours. The two-day project will focus on introducing Indigenous women to Indigenous ceremony and teachings through a Full Moon ceremony and building a sweat lodge. These activities will take place on separate days where your participation is required. The Full Moon ceremony will be approximately 6 hours and can take place in early spring. The building of the sweat lodge will take place in the early spring, approximately May.

In addition to the participation in the cultural teachings, I will conduct two talking circle to gather information on their experiences immediately after participation in the two ceremonies which will be digitally recorded and transcribed. The talking circles will take approximately two hours. Additionally, after the ceremonies and teachings are concluded, I will interview each participant one week after completion of the ceremonies individually to learn about their perspectives on learning ceremony, identify ways in which the teachings and ceremony began a healing process and why Elders are important during the healing process, what gaps are currently present in services being offered and how important this form of healing has on the potential for further community programming. These interviews will be approximately two hours. The length of the interviews will be determined on what you decide to share, and if needed, we can come back to continue the interview at a time that best suits your needs.

At any point during the research, you can stop participating. If you choose not to partake in the talking circle, you can decline at any time. Individual interview recordings can be stopped at any time and if you choose to set up another date or time this will be accommodated. The recording of the interviews is not required for participation in this research study, nor is full participation in all the Indigenous teachings or ceremonies.

It is understood that everyone is in various stages of their own healing journey, however to create a safe and welcoming environment for all it is mandatory that while participating in the ceremonies and gatherings participants do not attend while under the influence of substances. If participants present under the influence, they will be asked to leave. In the event that this does happen, participants are always

welcome to come back to the next gathering and continue their participation so long as they are not under the influence of substances.

Benefits

Participants may receive an honorarium of thirty dollars for each day they participate in the research. There is a total of three separate days that will provide a total of ninety dollars for each participant. Participants who choose to opt out of the research prior to completion, they will receive the honorarium based on the dates they participated in full. Participants who complete the study will receive a small gift worth no greater than twenty dollars totaling one hundred and ten dollars for honorariums and gifts per individual. Benefits also include attaining traditional knowledge from Cree and Ojibwe knowledge keepers shared in this study.

Risks

The risks associated with your participation in this study are minimal. Given that the research involves the Indigenous community and group participation, you may be identified by other participants involved in the research. Due to the community of experiential women connected to various resources and programming in the city of Winnipeg, there is a chance you may be identified through information you share in the interviews as well as the individual who recruited you.

To minimize this, I will take measures to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Also, it is a possibility that you feel triggered about some of the things you will discuss during the interview sessions. If you are uncomfortable by the interview, we encourage you to use the available resources for support or counseling. I will provide a list of resources or cultural supports, if you desire. You can choose not to answer any question and you can stop the interview at any time for any reason.

Confidentiality

Your responses during the study will be confidential by the researcher and research committee except for participants involved in the talking circles. Additionally, anyone helping with the sweat lodge will sign an Oath of Confidentiality. The one-to one interview will remain confidential, be digitally recorded and no one will be able to identify you by name, your identity will be replaced by alphanumeric label. All interviews will be kept in a password protected computer that only the researcher will have access. The information recorded is confidential and only Tammy Nelson will have access to the recording files. A professional transcriptionist will be hired to transcribe the recordings. The files will be directly uploaded to their secured web site and upon completion of the transcriptions, a request for the transcriptions to be deleted securely will be requested. Transcriptions will be labeled alphanumerically and will not contain any identifying information and only Tammy Nelson and her thesis council will have access to the transcripts. The transcripts consent forms will be stored securely in a locked cabinet, in my home office. The

recordings and the transcripts, and study materials that are written, stored on the computer as digital material, will be held for up to five years at which point they will be destroyed.

Sharing the Results

Results of this study will be disseminated through the thesis, presentations at scholarly conferences, workshops and through publication in academic journals. You will have the opportunity to read the publications prior and provide feedback, if you wish. A brief summary of the results will be provided to each participant at the conclusion of the data analysis by mail or email, and at the last gathering for this study.

Rights to Refuse or Withdraw

At any point in the interview, you may refuse to answer questions that they wish to share information. You may also withdraw from the study at any time, in the case of the withdrawal, please contact the researcher by phone, email or verbally to inform her of your decision. The data that was obtained will be destroyed and not used in the study, however, any data that was recorded during the talking circles cannot be deleted, however, your information from the talking circles will not be used in this research. You have the right to request that any of your information to be removed from the study up until the analysis begins and that the data can either be destroyed by the researcher or given to you at your request.

After the Interview

Participants may review the transcript once it has been typed up and change and/or remove anything that has been said and wishes to correct the information.

Providing Consent

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 subject. 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 consequences. 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 may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by Dr. Mary Kate Dennis; Cree Knowledge Keeper, Ed Azure; and Dr. Jane Ursel. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-

named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122 or humanethics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher and/or Delegate's Signature _____ Date _____

If you would like a copy of your transcript and/or summary of the results from this study, please share your email, mailing address, or alternative option.

Email/Address/Alternative option _____

I would like to receive a copy of my transcript: Yes No

I would like to receive a summary of the results: Yes No

The protocol was approved by the PSREB



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Appendix H: Confidentiality Of Oath

Study Title: Mookii Mikinak: A traditional road to healing for Indigenous women who experienced sexual exploitation

I, _____ affirm that I will not disclose
of make known any matter or thing related to the participants that comes to my knowledge during
this research study.

Name

Date

Signature of Witness

Date



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Appendix I: Flyer

MOOKII MIKINAK - EMERGING TURTLE

INDIGENOUS RESEARCH WITH INDIGENEOUS WOMEN WHO ARE SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

HAVE YOU...

- Had experiences in the sex industry? (street/online sex trade, massage parlors, pornography, exotic dancing, or experienced forms human trafficking) as a youth or adult?
- Do you self-identify as being Indigenous? (First Nations, Inuit, or Metis)

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED in learning more about how Indigenous ceremony and teachings can potentially help in your healing journey?

Masters of Social Work in Indigenous Knowledges program student Tammy Nelson is seeking 15 Indigenous cisgender or transgender women to VOLUNTARILY participate in a 2-Day Learning session where participants would take part in Indigenous ceremonies and teachings around the Full Moon and building of the Sweat Lodge. Participants are also asked to be apart of a 2 hour interview upon completion of the ceremonies. There will also be an optional half day to make a ribbon skirt .

- \$30.00 Dollar honorariums provided for participating in the full moon, sweat lodge and one-to-one interviews. k
- Bus tickets and transportation available to the ceremony locations



Interested women should:

- Have previous experiences in the sex industry either as a youth or adult
- Be adults (18+ years of age).
- Be open to learning and participating in Indigenous ceremonies
- Are able to participate for 2 days plus the 2 hour interview at the completion of the ceremonies

If you are interested in participating in this Indigenous research project, please contact the principal investigator TAMMY NELSON at 431-588-5991 or by email at

tnelson@myumanitoba.ca

Researcher Supervisor:
Mary Kate Dennis
Faculty of Social Work
University of Manitoba
William Norrie Centre
204-474-6871

marykate.dennis@umanitoba.ca



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Appendix J: Study Background Information (Given to potential participants)

Study Title: Mookii Mikinak – The traditional road to healing from sexual exploitation for Indigenous women

Researcher: Tammy Nelson MSW thesis research (Principal Investigator)

Masters of Social Work based in Indigenous Knowledges Program

University of Manitoba

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Hello, my name is Tammy Nelson. I am a student in the Master of Social Work based in Indigenous Knowledges working on a research study for my thesis at the University of Manitoba. I am conducting a study on how Indigenous teachings and ceremony can help with the healing of sexually exploited women. This study will contribute to knowledge about traditional Indigenous healing practices and cultural connections in Indigenous communities.

I am hoping to meet with you to discuss the possibility of participating in this research study. I would like to provide you with information about the study, questions I will be asking and consent forms for participation in the study. If you have any questions, I can answer any questions you might have.

Participants will take part in a total of four days during the research with an optional half day to make a ribbon skirt that will be required for ceremony. Two half days will be at the opening and

ending of the research where a pipe ceremony and feast will take place to honor the women and their time committed to the research. The time allotted to each half day is approximately 3 hours, totaling 6 hours for both days combined. The optional day will be for participants to make a ribbon skirt that will take approximately 4 hours. The two-day project where the focus will be introducing Indigenous women to Indigenous ceremony and teachings will take place on separate days where participation is required. The Full Moon ceremony will be approximately 6 hours and can take place in early spring. The building of the sweat lodge will take place in the early spring, approximately May. This time frame was provided by Cree knowledge keeper, Ed Azure where it was explained that when Mother Earth signifies to us the land is ready, the buds on the trees will start to emerge, and that this will be the time to take the women onto the land to build the sweat lodge. The time frame for this will be approximately 8 hours, with a combined total of 20 hours commitment from the participants. If participants chose to participate in the skirt making the time commitment would be a total of 24 hours.

If you are interested, please contact me by phone or email so we can we arrange a date, time, and location to discuss the possibility of participating in this research study.

Researcher Supervisor:

Mary Kate Dennis

Faculty of Social Work

University of Manitoba

William Norrie Centre

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]



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Appendix K: Script for Check-In Two Days After Ceremony

Hi, _____, It is Tammy Nelson. How are you doing? I am calling to check in with you and see how you are feeling after attending the ceremony. I wanted to make sure you are doing well, and to see if you have any questions, or concerns. I know that sometimes ceremony can bring things up for people in different ways, and I want to make sure that if you are experiencing any discomfort emotionally or mentally you are able to access supports. Do you have someone you can talk to, or if you like I can refer you to the resource list of resources in the community where you can access this?

Thanks for talking with me and if anything comes up and you need to ask a question, please do not hesitate to contact me.



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Appendix L: Closing Talking Circle Questions

1. What were your initial thoughts about attending ceremonies? Did your feelings change after attending ceremony, if yes, how so?
2. Do you feel that Indigenous ceremonies has a place for you in your own healing journey? If yes, how so?
3. Were there any barriers to attending ceremony? If yes, what were they, and how did this change for you?
4. What other ceremonies are you interested in participating in?