An Indigenous-Based Alternative to a Colonial Policy: A TribalCrit Analysis of the Progressive Conservative's Safer Streets Safer Lives Action Plan

by

Mark Granger

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I am indebted to you all, forever. Gratitude from the depths of my heart. Miigwetch.

IT IS ALL RELATED

Driving out to Kookoo Dianne's home to partake in a pipe ceremony to begin the interview portion of my thesis research, behind schedule, diving 110km/h North up the #8 Highway to her rural property on the Western shore of Lake Winnipeg, a jackrabbit emerges out of the field to my right, sprinting along the ditch nearly keeping pace with my van for what seemed like 100 meters. I think I've only seen a jackrabbit one other time in the wild, and never such an extreme exhibition of their physicality, but it seemed to run alongside me – almost to give me a rare, but clear glimpse at its majesty.

"What did you take it to mean?" Kookoo asked me.

"Hurry up," I joked.

I had been waylaid on my journey up to see her that day. As I was leaving the office of the organization I work, I noticed a bunch of staff running toward Gord Dong Park just up the road, Narcan kits in hand. Someone was overdosing.

I turned around, sprinted to the park, provided chest compressions to a young man while myself and a coworker administered three Narcan doses up the gentleman's nose, pumping his heart, until he regained consciousness. He thanked us briefly, earnestly, then walked off.

"I felt as though, it was something elusive – suddenly making itself known," I offered, returning to the topic of the jackrabbit. "Like, maybe this project – ethereal and idealized, becoming material, corporeal. Making itself known."

"Mmm," she offered in her usual way of conveying understanding, reflection, and gentleness to entertain all possibilities. "It's all a part of it, heh? The man in the park you helped before coming here... the rabbit... all of it is all connected, heh?"

I knew exactly what she meant. It is *all* related. Always.

PREFACE

Over the past nine and a half years, I have supported diverse Indigenous populations with cognitive disabilities and mental health issues in Winnipeg. Many have been incarcerated at some point in their lives. In supporting this population, I have come to a deep understanding that: whether by intention or in error, our governmental policies have facilitated racist outcomes that subjugate Indigenous populations through judicial, economic, political, cultural, familial, mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual sanctions.

The *Safer Streets Safer Lives Action Plan*, presented by the Progressive Conservative of Manitoba in the 2019 provincial election was arguably another iteration of status quo colonial policy measures that misallocate disproportionate resources to the policing and incarceration of individuals with substance use disorder and its correlated societal ills, rather than focussing those resources on social and structural determinants of health and wellbeing that have been shown to go hand in hand with crime and addiction (Smirl, 2019a).

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

In 2018, Winnipeg experienced a surge in drug-related criminal activity, mainly connected with methamphetamine. The city saw a per capita increase of 5% in violent crimes, 9% in property crimes, and 15% in drug crimes, with one-third of the city's homicides being related directly to methamphetamine (Petz, 2018). Possession charges had risen 890% since 2012 (Petz, 2018). Furthermore, Statistics Canada (2019) indicated that the Crime Severity Index [1]was up 6% from the previous year; methamphetamine possession charges were up 10%; and trafficking, production, and import/export charges were up 23% from the previous year.

Within the context of this surge, Manitoba held a provincial election, wherein rising crime rates were a focal point. As a response, the Progressive Conservative Party put forward the *Safer Streets Safer Lives Action Plan* (SSSLAP), which consisted of a $20 million dollar commitment to "treatment, education and enforcement" to combat methamphetamine and other drug related crime in Manitoba's communities (Charron, 2019, para.5). Key highlights from the plan included the allocation of between $8-$10 million dollars of total funding being spent on police, security, and surveillance enhancement, with the remaining funding unclearly divided between addiction treatment services, including mental health and educational programming (Smirl, 2019b).

The purpose of my thesis research is to: 1.) utilize TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2009) as an analytical framework to explore the various policy initiatives within the SSSLAP to determine whether they exacerbate/have exacerbated disproportionately negative outcomes for Indigenous Peoples; and 2.) learn about local Indigenous methods of understanding criminalization and

[1] Crime Severity Index is calculated by taking the total police incidents in a given area, multiplying by a seriousness factor from 1-7 and divided by the total population. It enables the tracking of changes in overall crime rates in given areas (Statistics Canada, 2009).

substance use for the purposes of identifying a model of policy intervention that is less harmful to Indigenous Peoples.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Indigenous Peoples make up around 12% of Winnipeg's population yet are over-represented in the criminal justice system (Government of Canada, 2019; Malakieh, 2018), crime victimization statistics (Boyce, 2014), and a host of other negative outcomes connected to social determinants of health and well-being (Smirl, 2019a). The rise in problematic substance use and crime are shown to disproportionately affect the impoverished, marginalized, racialized, and Indigenous communities in Winnipeg and across the province (Smirl, 2019a). A noteworthy correlation also exists between addiction and income inequality, under-education, unemployment, incarceration, police involvement, family disruption through the child welfare system, insecure housing, and the intergenerational effects of colonialism across Manitoba, which has been noted in the research (Brownell, et al., 2008; Fitzgerald & Carrington, 2008; Smirl, 2019a; Smylie & Firestone, 2016) Furthermore, being female and/or of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community members have been shown to experience higher incarceration rates, harsher sentences, greater poverty, and higher levels of violence in the community as outlined in various in depth research studies (National Inquiry into Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women & Girls (NIMMIWG), 2019; Marques & Monchalin, 2020; McGuire & Murdoch, 2022; Scribe, 2018). In reflection of these facts, Indigenous health and wellness should be on the forefront of any policy that is likely to affect this population, arguably with additional focus on Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ community members, if we are to deviate from these outcomes.

For decades now, governmental policies have predominantly followed a trajectory of defunding social welfare services (St. Denis, 2020; Teeple, 2000, as cited in Dobchuk-Land, et al. 2010), criminalizing substance use (Marshall, 2006), and otherwise facilitating racialized disadvantage through policies that neglect the needs of the community (Fitzgerald & Carrington, 2008; Krieger, 2008, as cited in Jardine & Lines, 2018), and perpetuate a narrative of racialized outcomes being *just the way things are* in mainstream discourse (Schneider, et al. 2014).

The SSSLAP includes education and treatment, but with its preferential orientation towards law-enforcement as the means of addressing community safety it remains another example of status quo policy, intertwined with colonialism, reliant on community policing, and utilizing apparatuses of control, coercion, and assimilation (Czyzewski, 2011), which is likely to exacerbate the already overburdened structural and social determinants of health of Indigenous Peoples (Saunders, et al. 2017). Mental health measures included in the plan lack explicit collaboration between police and mental health workers, or specialized police training, which have been shown to reduce negative interactions between police and mental health service users (Mulay, et al. 2016).

To address the critical needs of Indigenous Peoples in our communities, and to raise our communities collectively, there is a need to include Indigenous Knowledge and voices in policy formation and application. If we continue to neglect these considerations, we are likely to continue to perpetuate and exacerbate existing disparities and inequitable outcomes for Indigenous Peoples.

RESEARCH PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this research was to utilize TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2009) for an overarching assessment framework on the likely impacts of SSSLAP initiatives. Briefly, TribalCrit acknowledges that we live in a society that is undergirded by White, Western, Eurocentric narratives whose policies are enacted as a method of retaining that hegemonic order, predicated on the subjugation of Indigenous and BIPOC communities, voices, and ways of being in the world. With this understanding in mind, TribalCrit seeks emancipatory methods of critical thought, research, mobilization, and consciousness creation. Applying TribalCrit as a theoretical framework towards these emancipatory aims I have integrated the perspectives of seven Indigenous research participants with lived experience and expertise from the community in the form of storytelling and personal narrative as the foundation for policy development through a series of one-to-one conversations. These individuals work in various community service areas, and common themes were revealed from the interviews for addressing substance use, criminalization of communities, and community safety. The themes gathered from the interviews were used to outline a policy framework for an alternative action plan based upon Indigenous stories and knowledge, as well as to propose future research recommendations.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions that have guided this thesis project are: 1. What are the impacts of the *Safer Streets Safer Lives Action Plan* (Progressive Conservative, 2019) with specific concern for Indigenous Peoples? 2. How would diverse Indigenous Knowledges understand and address substance use and criminalization of communities differently?

SELF-LOCATION

I am a mix of third-generation English, Mennonite, and Ukrainian settler/colonialist, second-generation Swede and Métis (French/Swampy Cree from Lake Manitoba region). My

spirit name, received by Dianne Cross during a sweat lodge ceremony is Good Hearted Stone Man. My primary educational background is in social work; however, I also hold a bachelor's degree in philosophy. Over 17 years in human services has led me to a thorough understanding that front-line, community-based work is where much of the effort is applied to human services; however, experience has also taught these services can be rendered ineffective if they are not reinforced by governmental policies that support these initiatives. Furthermore, should governmental policies be hostile to human and social services they can unravel social safety nets, disintegrate networks of support, and undermine community wellbeing.

I recognize much of my own ignorance of Indigenous epistemologies that have ultimately informed my research, but I came to this process to engage in a ceremony of relationship (Wilson, 2008) with genuine intention, open curiosity, love, humility, respect, and a sincere desire to help all my relations – that is, the community of all things, of which we are all a part. I feel that my place of privilege may offer an opportunity to amplify the voices of those who hold the knowledge that can, perhaps, positively affect the communities concerned.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review examined the SSSLAP action plan's "pillars:" "enforcement," "treatment," and "education" (at elementary and secondary school levels) as a means of combatting substance use and crime.

Afterwards, I reviewed the literature pertaining to Indigenous modes of understanding and addressing crime, addictions treatment, as well as substance use prevention programming through education utilizing similar search parameters outlined below.

Databases searched were Criminal Justice Abstracts, ProQuest Criminal Justice, Social Work Abstracts, PubMed, Google Scholar, and the University of Manitoba's main library search tool. Search strings utilized were specific to each pillar listed above, combined with verbs like, "impact," "effect" OR "efficacy" OR "effectiveness," OR "change." For example, in examining the effect of policing on crime, I offered search parameters such as, "police AND crime AND change OR impact." Or, for Indigenous conceptualizations of crime I offered parameters such as, "Indigenous" AND "crime" AND "understand*" OR "meaning" OR "epistemolog*" – to try to catch multiple terms that may apply to this research (e.g., epistemological, epistemology). Most research was sought from the past 20 years; however, some comprehensive studies were utilized from farther back in the literature timeline, which seemed pertinent due to the size, scope, or application of the studies.

While most of the literature utilized was peer-reviewed, I have also utilized selected writings on the topic of crime, addiction, and correlated phenomena from writers in the fields of Indigenous issues, substance use, crime, and rehabilitation, as well as governmental and collaborative documents.

GENERAL POLICING

In examining the pillars of the SSSLAP, a general review of the impact of policing in addressing crime seemed a prudent starting point to assess the merits of the most funded area of the proposal.

Some authors have drawn an evidence-based correlation between the number of police per capita and a reduction in crime (Corman & Mocan, 2000; Demers, 2019; Mello, 2019). By analysing decades of crime statistics from New York City, Corman and Mocan (2000) were able to identify a correlation between the size of the police force and decreases in crime. However, it is worth noting that targeting particular crimes was more effective in reducing violent crimes. For example, they found that increases in drug arrests had very little correlation in reducing robberies, but increasing robbery arrests had a direct effect on the number of robberies that occurred, suggesting that targeted policing could be more effective than merely increasing the number of police. Similarly, Demers (2019) conducted a panel data analysis of 699 municipal jurisdictions across Canada and was able to illustrate that more police tended to equate to less crime, with specific efficacy related to burglary and vehicle theft. While Mello's (2019) analysis of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) community crime prevention grants (provided to jurisdictions that fit a needs-based criteria) showed that communities that received grants to hire more police showed a reduction in crime, consistent with the above examples, indicating that increased police presence was most effective in reducing robbery and vehicle theft.

However, Rosenfeld and Wallman (2019), studied a precipitous rise in homicides in 2015, which some politically-oriented groups had attributed to "The Fergusson Effect" of police not arresting community members for criminal activity due to a perceived backlash from the

public during the broadly publicized events of that time. Through structural equation modelling they were able to determine that de-policing, as represented by a reduction in arrest rates, had little effect on homicide rates from 2010 to 2015. However, this study only referenced arrests and may not be telling for the overall effect of police and policing on crime rates. Along similar lines, Kleck and Barnes (2014) tested the hypothesis that more police per capita would act as a deterrent, suggesting individuals would *perceive* the likelihood of punishment as higher if there were more police – therefore, more police would result in less crime. They conducted 1,500 random surveys in the United States to determine whether this deterrent was perceived. They found a slight inverse relationship between police numbers and perception of likelihood of arrest/punishment, disproving the traditional understanding of a deterrent being the mechanism by which crime is reduced by police presence. They conclude that, if there is a relationship between increasing police presence and reduction in crime, they were unable to determine by what mechanism that effect occurred and in fact suggested that the correlation otherwise identified in the literature may be the result of misreading of data or faulty assumptions in the research.

Another study that was often cited in the literature as a reference point to the lack of impact on police presence to changing crime rates was the Kansas City Preventative Patrol Experiment (Kelling, et al. 1974), which engaged three areas in Kansas City to determine if police presence influenced crime rates. One area had patrols reduced to enter the area only to respond to service calls, another area had an increase of patrols two to three times the usual level and the last area had no change in the number of patrols sent to the area. They found there was no impact created by the change of patrols. This study was utilized despite its dated reference because of its control group-based methodology.

Eck and Maguire (2000) through a thorough review of literature on the topic captured the challenge in analysing the effect of police on crime rates when they indicated that it seems unreasonable to assume that police are singularly responsible for crime rates and should be viewed as part of a "network of institutions...that respond to crime" (p. 249-250). Therefore, any study that purports to prove or disprove a change in police numbers *causes* a change in crime rates is likely a false correlation and a reductive interpretation of the data.

RECOVERY AND TREATMENT

Bennett and Halloway's (2016) systematic review of the literature on treatment interventions for drug-addicted populations showed that a wide variety of approaches can be effective in promoting recovery from substance abuse. For instance, drug replacement therapies (providing alternative, state-sanctioned pharmaceuticals as replacements for "street drugs") were found to be an effective amelioration to criminal tendencies in recovering substance users, especially where the addiction was to heroin. Therapeutic communities, wherein service users participate in a community context with other individuals who are also trying to recover from substance abuse disorders, also had a consistently beneficial effect on addiction recovery. Moore et al.'s (2020) systematic review of therapeutic interventions that were applied at re-entry (when one leaves a prison or jail) indicated that over half of the studies demonstrated reductions in recidivism and substance use. However, the authors indicated that because most of the studies utilized differing metrics, time periods, modalities of treatment and sample sizes, it was difficult to generalize the findings. The authors also found that addressing substance use, without addressing other criminogenic needs was unlikely to have a significant, substantial effect on recidivism rates. Lastly, they found that some interventions showed an *increase* in recidivism, but the research suggested that those interventions used methods that put the formerly

incarcerated individuals under greater scrutiny, making them more likely to get caught for offences.

According to De Crescenzo et al. (2018) psychosocial interventions had been the primary clinically recommended measure to address cocaine and amphetamine addiction, but their research sought to discover which method(s) were most effective for lasting results. Their meta-analysis of 50 randomized control trails, evaluating 12 different psychosocial interventions on cocaine and amphetamine addiction suggested that contingency management (a rewards-based system for abstinence) with community reinforcement, showed the highest levels of abstinence at follow-up.

The overlap of criminality and substance abuse harkens back to the previous work cited by Gill (2016), which suggested that enhancing informal bonds in the community can be a positive influence on former offenders. As writer and journalist Johann Hari, indicated based on his in-depth research into addiction, "the opposite of addiction is not sobriety – it's connection" (Corballis & Hari, 2018, p. 62).

EDUCATION

As the third and final pillar of the SSSLAP, education was identified as a critical aspect of intervention in addressing substance use and crime in Winnipeg. What follows is the exploration of education as a tool for intervention in addressing problematic substance use.

Flynn et al. (2015) conducted a review of six independently conducted (as opposed to sponsored research) randomized control trials (RCT's) on the effectiveness of middle school-based curricula addressing substance use among students. Of the six studies that evaluated four different school programs, only one showed any statistical significance at follow-up. One of the

programs may have had a negative effect on marijuana use in the student population, but the authors accept that this may be due to other contributing factors, rather than a negative effect of the program. Faggiano et al., (2014) conducted a similar study, but included sponsored RCT's. Of the 51 studies they included in their review, the authors found that programs based on social competence or social influence seemed to have weak effects that rarely produced statistically significant results. Programming that involved both social competence and social influence had a greater effect in preventing marijuana use or other drug use at long-term follow up. Knowledge-based programming (i.e., learning about illicit substances) had no effect on substance use.

INDIGENOUS-BASED INTERVENTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

In reviewing literature for consideration of this thesis topic and the research proposed, it was important to lay out parallel considerations on crime and justice, health, wellness and addiction, and education focussed on addiction from diverse Indigenous viewpoints. This section will review these broad topics below.

CRIME

An important foundation on crime and criminology, from a critical Indigenous standpoint is to examine the epistemological hegemony that exists in settler colonial states, such as Canada. Within Canada, we have a judicial system that is based on European models of criminality and punitive retribution as the means of correction. There is little room for alteration from this fundamental *you do the crime, you do the time* mentality. Cunneen and Tauri (2019) suggest that hostile acts occur from the hegemonic powers, against groups whose epistemologies are contrary to, in the case of Western criminology, a "rationalist, scientific paradigm," which estimates its own values as universally accurate – or at least more correct than all others (p. 365). This belief

is in sharp contrast to foundations of some Anishinaabe legal traditions, which asserts there is *no* objective truth (Hewitt, 2016). Cuneen and Tauri (2019) go on to suggest that the history of criminology is that of a technology utilized for social control and dominance. Furthermore, barriers to establishing alternative, parallel justice protocols are, as Cuneen (2011) suggests, based in the risk aversion of Western societies, which subordinates notions of sovereignty and self-determination beneath the membership of being part of a "risk-defined group" (p. 319). In other words, the risk of having an offender not held to "Western standards of justice" could lead to further harm, and so, should not be considered. Additionally, Cuneen suggests that increasing trends in nationalism see Indigenous sovereignty and alternative policy interventions as a threat to national collective identity and unity, and are therefore met with intolerance.

The above-mentioned resistance to alternatives is not without exception, however. In the 1990s as the justice community was examining Indigenous over-representation in jails, and the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry was grappling with inequities in the justice system, restorative justice programs were being utilized in several Indigenous communities in Canada (Hewitt, 2016). Restorative justice is a framing of the legal process, diverse in its expression but generally characterized as a process in which offenders, those offended against, as well as other community members who may be affected (even indirectly) are consulted with the intention of identifying a suitable outcome that restores harmony in the community that has been affected by the contravention by the offender. It tends to be focussed on healing, relational wellbeing and maintaining the dignity of everyone involved (Hewitt, 2016) and can facilitate the strengthening of bonds and development of internal resources within that community to support offenders (United Nations Office on Drugs & Crime, 2018, as cited in Lee & Dandurand, 2020). Furthermore, it is holistic in its approach to healing, seeking to address underlying precipitous

factors for the criminal behaviour (Milward, 2008). It is likely for these reasons that the United Nations has been promoting the development of restorative justice programs around the world, as an alternative to prosecution (Lee & Dandurand, 2020).

One such program was set up by the members of the Rama First Nation, in Southeastern Ontario. It was called Biidabaan, "dawn comes" or "dawn arrives" in Anishinaabe (L. McRae, Elder teaching, as cited in Hewitt, 2016). It must be accepted by both parties to proceed, and is a longer process, as it is open to any community members who may wish to be involved. The recidivism rate for offenders in this program was less than 5%. Western judicial practices in Canada yield a recidivism rate of roughly 27% (Hewitt, 2016). However, other assessments of restorative justice have shown results that are less significant.

For example, Sherman et al.'s (2014) systematic review of restorative justice conferences (RJC) examined 10 different randomized control trials (RCTs) to determine the efficacy of RJCs. While their conclusions pertaining to recidivism were far more modest than those listed above, they did find that the greatest impact was in the reduction repeat offences of violent crime (.2 standard deviation, but still not statistically significant), with very little apparent effect in reduction on property crimes. Overall, their review suggests that as a supplemental justice approach, RJCs appear to show a positive, cost-effective impact on reducing repeat offences especially in violent crimes, where the emotional content of the conferences was the highest. This effect, they theorized, was likely due to the elicitation of the most intense emotional reactions from the offenders during the conferences. A similar systematic review by Strang et al. (2013) revealed almost identical findings – that the reductions in recidivism were modest (greatest in violent crimes, least in property crime), but still quite cost effective, and that satisfaction rates were much higher among victims.

In contradiction to the above-mentioned reductions in recidivism among violent offenders, a meta-analysis conducted by Fulham et al. (2023) found restorative justice (RJ) programs had no significant effect on violent crime, however a small (but statistically significant) reduction in general recidivism. Their conclusions on the merits of RJ programs suggested that the assessment of the program would benefit from expanding the metrics of evaluation beyond recidivism, to include victim and client satisfaction, sentiments surrounding fairness, accountability, and procedural justice perceptions, all of which exhibited more positive outcomes.

Further to the broader topic of Indigenous methods of criminal redress, Cunneen and Tauri (2019) also referenced the work of Māori scholar Moana Jackson, who conducted three years of research with Māori individuals, some of whom had experiences within the justice system, to determine ways of integrating Māori traditions into the Australian justice protocols. Following her recommendations, at first only token gestures were taken from the literature, but over time Australian justice processes have come to include traditional *marae* – or meeting houses – traditionally used to address a situation when one had offended against the community. The *marae* have been implemented for restorative justice programs, youth courts, and rehabilitation programs. Other recommendations implemented to some extent included cultural training, affirmative action to utilize the living knowledge of the Māori in the judicial process, referring clients to Māori providers, cultural training and holding hearings on the traditional recommendations.

Cuneen (2011) also suggests that communities that exist within colonial states do implement other culturally oriented traditions for addressing crime, outside of state control. Within Winnipeg, for example, the Bear Clan, Mama Bear Clan, Zoongizi Ode (formerly

Fearless R2W), and other organic, Indigenous-based community groups provide safety mechanisms that operate outside the Western, criminal justice umbrella, in line with traditional Indigenous values of reciprocal community building and cultivation. These interventions are in line with Georg and Manning's (2022) research into a remote, northern Indigenous community in Australia. They suggest that approaches to enhancing community safety must be holistic, strengths-based, community-centred, and revolve around establishing respectful relationships within the community to be effective.

HEALTH, WELLNESS, AND SUBSTANCE USE CONCERNS

In 2016 the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), through a 3-year collaborative research project, compiled a document outlining the holistic nature of Indigenous wellness, with a particular focus on addictions treatment. Built upon the wisdom of knowledge keepers and traditional elders, the document puts forth a theory of wellness based on a balance of spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical health, connected with "language, land, beings of creation, and ancestry, supported by a caring family and environment" (Dumont, 2014, p. 2 as cited in CIHR, 2016). The document suggests several specific cultural practices (e.g., naming ceremony, land-based activities, fasting, hunting, fishing, etc.) as modes of engaging traditional cultural knowledge and healing, but the essence of the document is encapsulated by Elder Jim Dumont, who stated, "...the Great Spirit gave to his/her children to live in this physical world in a good way... This means that the answer to addressing substance use issues exists within Indigenous culture" (CIHR, 2016, p. 10,).

Similarly, Health Canada (2011), in collaboration with the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), National Native Addiction Partnership Foundation (NNAPF) and the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB) reviewed substance use related supports for Indigenous Peoples

across Canada from 2007 to 2011. The review provided a series of guiding principles for implementing a continuum of supports for Indigenous Peoples experiencing addiction issues. While echoing many of the necessities of the CIHR document outlined above, pertaining to cultural restoration and reconnection, Health Canada outlined a continuum that ranged from community wellness and prevention strategies, early assessment and intervention, harm reduction, through to treatment, including treatment of unique demographics of co-occurring diagnoses, and service delivery. The document suggests relying on evidence-based practices of Indigenous and Western modalities to provide services to address the complex needs of the community, while promoting community wellness and enhancing the strengths that lie within local groups (i.e., a holistic orientation). The document posits the maintenance of the integrity of Indigenous cultural traditions, while encouraging the implementation of "Western" processes of accreditation, performance measurements and pharmacological intervention. The document clearly outlines the need to maintain the essence of First Nations culture throughout treatment, to avoid colonial overreach in the services.

Additionally, Rowan et al. (2014) demonstrated, through a scoping study of 19 addictions treatment programs in North America, that Indigenous-Western hybrid addictions treatment programs were practical and beneficial in promoting mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health, but were also able to demonstrate a reduction in substance use disorder in 74% of studies. These studies utilized sweat lodge ceremonies, smudging (burning of cedar, sweetgrass, sage, tobacco and other traditional medicines for prayer or purification purposes), social activities, and traditional oral teachings as some of the Indigenous components for treatment. Western modalities included counseling and group work, nutritional support, family enhancement, psychoeducation, assessment, and case management, among others. While the diversity in

programming made it difficult for the authors to generalize about best practices, the authors found that culturally based interventions are beneficial for improving the holistic wellness of Indigenous persons with substance use disorder.

INDIGENOUS-BASED SUBSTANCE USE EDUCATION

Okamoto et al.'s (2014) work on the need for Indigenous grounded drug prevention education in schools in Hawaii showed, through focus groups with Indigenous Hawaiian youth, that the context in which Indigenous youth live and experience addiction is different from their non-Indigenous counterparts. The authors also noted that drug prevention education that is developed for other marginalized groups (e.g., Mexican youth) were not transferrable as an effective substance use reduction strategy, suggesting the need for culturally-specific education. In 2020, Maina et al. provided a scoping review of Indigenous-based substance use prevention programming in schools in Canada, the United States, and Australia for youth 7-13 years of age. The authors found that making programming culturally relevant to Indigenous students produced results that were more effective, appropriate, and long-lasting. Furthermore, they suggested that Indigenous community members were best suited to adapting the programming while maintaining the fidelity of the initial programming. These sentiments were echoed by Smith et al. (2022), whose scoping study of school-based prevention programs for Indigenous youth indicated that Indigenous Peoples were a paramount resource in the consultation and development of effective substance use prevention resources to be delivered to Indigenous youth.

SUMMARY

Reviewing the central pillars of the SSSLAP policy proposal, there is conflicting evidence for the efficacy of the recommended policy pillars. However, from a critical analytical standpoint, the policy is very much status quo in its preferential funding of law enforcement and

criminal justice to address substance use and criminalization, followed by the deserved "reforming" substance user seeking treatment, and the protection of the youth through educational programming.

Indigenous contributions to this topic, however, provide a much more holistic framework of intervention in all comparative areas – through holistic, inclusive justice and treatment models that incorporate the whole person, community, and so forth. It appears that Indigenous modes of intervention had not been considered at any level of the action plan but have much to offer in addressing the challenges of substance use and criminalization, while likely mitigating harms to Indigenous Peoples caused by a status quo approach.

GAPS IN THE LITERATURE

Critically, in much of the literature there is an absence of articulation of specific First Nations' identity experiences (i.e., Cree, Ojibway, Dene experiences, specifically) within the broader group that are referred to in the literature as Indigenous Peoples, Aboriginal Peoples, or Native Americans. Some articles were focussed on specific traditions, but much of the literature surrounding Indigenous issues were lacking specificity. Furthermore, statistical data that highlights Indigenous Peoples' experiences are presented as a homogenous group. This has the effect of reducing diverse experiences of Cree, Ojibway, Dene, Inuit, Dakota, Nakota, Métis, Saulteaux, and others into a single, Pan-Indigenous narrative within the literature.

The gap in the literature that specifically concerns this thesis has been in the gathering of Indigenous Knowledge to the specific place, time and set of circumstances of present-day Winnipeg, Manitoba. As Hart (2010) indicates, Indigenous Knowledge is holistic, *place-based*, and oral in tradition. It is experiential, communicated through ceremony, tradition, stories, and songs and is elicited in a fluid interaction between the spiritual and physical world, between the

land and all of creation (as cited in Cuneen & Tauri, 2019). That *place-based knowledge* of Winnipeg's unique composition is absent in the literature.

It is from this specific base that I have humbly sought knowledge to help address the ills surrounding substance use and criminalization of communities that Winnipeg is faced with. As Cuneen and Tauri (2019) indicate on the present, "Indigenous perspectives on crime control, in particular what causes crime and over-representation and how best to respond, have little place in the policy formulation of the state" (p. 374). This thesis has been aimed to contribute to changing that trend. As Stearn et al. (2021) articulated, while voting is an indirect way to affect policy change, being engaged in the actual formation of policy provides a much more concrete and direct influence on policy for the interests of those it concerns.

CHAPTER 3 - PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

As has been demonstrated in the literature, the SSSLAP presented an action plan for intervention that in many ways was likely to perpetuate racist (and sexist) outcomes in the form of primarily judicial intervention, with some humanistic interventions (i.e., rehabilitation and mental health programming, and education). This policy implies that addiction and its harms are largely criminal in origin, in that, to address these issues, the state needs to prioritize law-enforcement efforts. Additionally, addiction can be mitigated through education and, in some instances, rehabilitation.

In addition to this, the literature also provided an evidence basis for the merits of Indigenous Knowledges in addressing substance use, criminalization, and education.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to critically analyse the implementation of the SSSLAP, to explore the consequences that are likely to exacerbate dire circumstances among Indigenous communities in Winnipeg, and to engage local Indigenous voices to collaboratively explore place-based knowledge about Winnipeg's unique challenges and opportunities in addressing substance use and criminalization to develop an alternative Indigenous-informed policy proposal.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant for several reasons, all of which can be recognized as being subsumed within the notion of reconciliation. First, in this time of reconciliation between the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island and the settler-colonial state, Canada, efforts to reconcile must strive for more than platitudes and gestures of good intent. The apologies of Prime Ministers or land-acknowledgements at community events are hollow and lack relevance if they

are not followed up with restorative policy measures that address the current issues that are the result of our shared, colonial history.

Policies have the power to shape social and structural determinants of health (Jardine & Lines, 2018) through actions that either bolster or impede those facets of individual and community wellbeing. Thus, without privileging the voices of those individuals disproportionately disaffected in the political discourse regarding substance use and criminalization, which is to say Winnipeg's Indigenous population, we are likely to perpetuate the subjugation and subordination of Indigenous Peoples through error or intent.

Second, if we, as a nation bound by the fabric of our communities, are to genuinely address the needs of our population we need to examine and explore what is working and dismantle what is not. For example, when we look at increasing numbers of disproportionately Indigenous Peoples, and Indigenous women in particular, suffering within the justice system, it is plainly seen that something is in dire need of examination, if not deconstruction. Either it is not working as it is intended to and must be reformed, or – from Brayboy's (2009) assertion that policies tend to be oriented towards the promotion of white supremacy – it is working as intended, and it must be dismantled and created anew. In either case and more broadly speaking, there are opportunities to reform our systems to benefit all our relations, and we need the courage, curiosity, love, and respect to seek out those remedies from outside Western sources of knowledge. If we do not explore the application of diverse Indigenous-based wisdom of this land, we may miss an enormous opportunity for enhancing the wellbeing of all communities.

Third, utilizing the tenets of social constructivism, that "reality" is constructed through cultural, social and historical norms, combined with the admission that there is an objectively "real" outcome of disproportionately affected Indigenous People in the carceral, medical and

mental health systems, it rationally follows that one should be researching *with* Indigenous Peoples: what is happening? why is it happening? and how can we all work together to fix it?

Thus, I believe this research is significant as a means of providing an emancipatory platform upon which to situate Indigenous voices as a central, formative force in informing and creating policy that affects Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities as part of a shared community. Centering Indigenous Knowledges in this form of policy development is emancipatory because it grounds policy in the lived realities of the communities it affects and informs solutions emergent from those knowledge bases. I believe that policy initiatives of this type that embrace and provide primacy to Indigenous teachings can have a broad, lasting benefit to us all. Furthermore, as the trend of over-incarceration, disproportionate addiction rates, mental health issues and other outcomes antagonistic towards the quality of life of Indigenous Peoples worsen, we are compelled to seek out alternative ways of addressing these issues, founded on Indigenous principles.

THE PULL OF INDIGENOUS-BASED RESEARCH

The appeal of Indigenous-based research in this context has been in situating diverse Indigenous voices at the forefront of issues that have such a formidable impact on Indigenous Peoples, locally. It has the potential of shedding light on the issue in a way that raises social consciousness and pushes for policy change (Bloomberg, 2023). Additionally, engaging in Indigenous research within policy formation is an intrinsically anti-colonial act and brings diverse Indigenous perspectives into an arena that they are rarely embraced (Cuneen & Tauri, 2019). Furthermore, the dismantling and reformation of mainstream systems of operating that perpetuate and entrench outcomes that are hostile towards diverse Indigenous Peoples is an urgent and pressing need that requires more than attention, but action as well. It demands

integration of holistic thinking, of Spirit, of love and respect. It demands an Indigenous approach.

CHAPTER 4 - THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

As previously outlined, the purpose of this research has been 1.) to use TribalCrit to critically examine the recommendations and implementation of the SSSLAP with specific concern for diverse Indigenous Peoples; 2.) to explore the impacts on Indigenous Peoples; and 3.) to learn from diverse local Indigenous Peoples who work in the community to better understand problematic substance use and criminalization from various Indigenous perspectives for the purpose of co-creating an alternative policy plan that incorporates diverse Indigenous Knowledge to address substance use and criminalization in Winnipeg.

The following section will start with the theoretical framework and why those choices have been made for the research purpose. Then the research design will provide the backdrop upon which the research will take place, followed by identification of sources of information, and motivation for that selection. This section will also include eligibility criteria, and the recruitment method. Guiding questions for the interviews will be presented, and subsequent analytical process for the SSSLAP policy documents, conversation transcripts, and talking circle conclusions. It will provide information on Kookoo Dianne Cross and Lilian Bonito's contributions to the research, as well as information regarding honouring the research participants' time and contributions, and ethical considerations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical basis for the research that has been conducted initiates from a critical, anti-colonial perspective as articulated in Brayboy's (2009) TribalCrit and a social-constructivist foundation, with contributions from Kovach (2018). Furthermore, the "Two-Eyed Seeing" approach has been utilized throughout the process (Bartlett, et al. 2012; Wright, et al. 2019) - both as a theoretical basis and a method for data interpretation and ultimately, policy formation.

The three theoretical bases have been selected for their utility to act in concert with one another for the purposes of this research, and are complementary and mutually reinforcing, as outlined below.

TribalCrit is an analytical tool created by Brayboy (2009), developed out of the scholarship surrounding Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stafancic, 2017). As with all critical theories, TribalCrit directs the focus of inquiry and research towards emancipatory ends. Brayboy suggests that policies must be analysed from an understanding that colonization is endemic to society and that policies that affect Indigenous Peoples tend to subordinate them while supporting white supremacy through assimilative means. Furthermore, Brayboy suggests that Indigenous Peoples hold a place within society that is both racialized and political, in that their identity is bound between striving for sovereign rights while existing as marginalized and racialized communities within the hegemonic system. He also suggested they strive for autonomy (which can be thought of as the capacity to make free decisions that concern one's community or self), sovereignty (that those capacities are unencumbered by an over-arching state), self-determination (that the paths forward are selected without coercion or control), and self-identification (that individuals and communities can identify who they are, rather than having labels imposed upon them). The lack of integration of diverse Indigenous Knowledge and consideration of impacts upon Indigenous Peoples into policy formation suggests the possibility that policy on criminology is a tool of social control and maintenance of Western hegemony and imperialism (Cuneen & Tauri 2019). Brayboy adds that the forms of autonomy and self-determination mentioned above are informed by Indigenous epistemologies, customs, and traditions, which lay the theoretical groundwork to provide alternative (from Western/Eurocentric) ways of being for the purposes of challenging hegemonic structures that

disempower diverse Indigenous communities. It is for that reason that approaching the research goal (i.e., an Indigenous-based alternative policy framework) needs to be informed by the traditions, culture, and philosophical worldviews of local Indigenous Peoples in order to strive towards those aims. Finally, from a motivational standpoint, Brayboy states that the culmination of the principles above supports the academic impetus to strive towards decolonizing aims.

It should be noted that this research has been based on diverse, local Indigenous Peoples' knowledge, and is therefore a sort of eclectic integration of diverse Indigenous perspectives. However, as outlined in Kovach (2018), while different Indigenous traditions hold different beliefs, there are commonly held understandings about the potential *sources* of knowledge, and what qualifies as knowledge. Kovach offered that knowledge originates from a holistic experience of the "empirical, experiential, sensory and metaphysical..."; that it arises from *relationship with* and *relationship to*, or what Kovach referred to as "interconnectivity and interdependency"; knowledge is not static; and it arises from multiple sources, including "nonhuman sources" (p. 218). These thematic statements on the recognized sources of knowledge guided the collection, creation, and integration of knowledge, rather than a specific philosophical orientation towards a single First Nation, Métis, or Inuit tradition. This eclectic approach was well-suited for this thesis insofar as, Winnipeg is comprised of diverse Indigenous Peoples from all over Manitoba (and beyond) and therefore ought to include diverse Indigenous voices from various First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities.

TribalCrit was used to critically analyse the SSSLAP policy, press releases, speeches in the legislature, and supporting documentation of the SSSLAP implementation to explore the impact on Indigenous Peoples in particular.

The purpose of including social constructivism as a guiding theoretical basis for this research was multifaceted. Firstly, TribalCrit is fundamentally a social constructivist theory, in that it implies a power struggle between opposing ideologies that are fundamentally informed by the cultural, historical, and social values that underpin the policies in question, and that *reality* is constructed within each of these worldviews. SSSLAP is informed by Western, masculinist, hegemonic values of social order, maintained by a police force, and education and rehabilitation for the needy. Based on what I know of Indigenous principles and holistic, relational wellbeing, I theorized an alternative Indigenous-based policy framework would likely orient based on healing, interdependent wellbeing, and holistic enrichment of the individual and community, as inseparable from one another. Each of these perspectives are situated in a particular worldview, which Hart (2010) articulated as the "cognitive, perceptual, and affective maps" that we use to make sense of the world (p. 2). Additionally, as Wilson (2008) suggests, the outcome sought in critical and constructivist research is not merely the knowledge gathered, but the outcomes generated because of the research.

To expand on this point, from a policy analysis perspective, the SSSLAP is a policy built upon social, cultural, and historical representations of reality that are oriented towards a Western model of addressing crime, which is essentially punitive. For example, while addressing social determinants of health and wellbeing, pertaining to food security, wealth, education, stress, and so forth is considered a novel approach for Western societies in promoting wellness within communities, Indigenous Knowledges of holistic wellbeing have included these aspects, and more for time immemorial (Jardine & Lines, 2018).

Secondly, social constructivism's relevance in this research is based in the acknowledgment that I have approached this research from a perspective that is informed by my

own experiences - professionally, academically, and culturally. It has been situated within my own experiences, knowledge, and sentiments and is laden with my own values – my own worldview. For instance, my academic and professional experiences working with Indigenous populations of Winnipeg have returned time and again to a commonly iterated sentiment: the healing *for* the community, will come *from* the community. Which, in the context of this research essentially applies as, there is an issue that disproportionately affects Indigenous populations, and it requires Indigenous solutions. These are my views, that have directed and framed my research because of who I am.

Additionally, based in the appreciation that the world we live in, created by policy, culture, and tradition, perpetuate outcomes that favour hegemonic groups of people and disadvantage marginalized ones is due to a process of policy creation that stems from fundamental assumptions about what the problems are, and where the solutions lie. Brayboy's assertion that colonization is endemic, suggests that the backdrop upon which governmental policies like the SSSLAP are written, implicitly perpetuate white supremacy, whether through intentional oppression or subjective misinterpretation of the problem.

I have also utilized the practice of "Two-Eyed Seeing" (Bartlett et al., 2012; Wright et al., 2019) to orient a hybridization of diverse Indigenous Knowledge and perception, blended with Western models of critical thought, policy analysis, and policy generation applied to this topic. Two-Eyed Seeing in this case is a method of weaving Indigenous Knowledge creation (narratives and storytelling) with Western aims – in this case, policy research and generation. I postulate that there is relevant, local Indigenous Knowledge that can be applied to the issues concerning criminalization and substance use in Winnipeg, and there is a pointedness to Western critical theory and policy analysis that needs to be applied to these issues. Western applications

of critical theory, policy analysis, and policy formation through one eye, blended with Indigenous worldviews and experiences through the other eye, is a harmonious illustration of Two-Eyed Seeing I felt was well-suited for this research topic.

The apparent risk with applying Two-eyed seeing to this form of research and interpretation for the purposes of policy formation is that explicit interpretation is contradictory to oral traditions of First Nations on Turtle Island. The essence that is gifted through story-telling and oral tradition is the subjective and relational experience of the story (Stevenson, 2000 as cited in Kovach, 2009). Which is to say, the relationship between the storyteller, the story, and the listener. Therefore, in the process of interpreting, categorizing, and *confining* the shared wisdom to facilitate the policy formation process has a risk of "colonizing" the wisdom through that confinement process. Additionally, it has been noted in the literature that those approaching Indigenous Knowledge from a Western perspective with the intention of equally perceiving the two perspectives still tends to lean towards the expression of the knowledge and vision of the writer's origin (Broadhead & Howard, 2021). The hope was that, through a process of culturally informed collaboration with the research participants, including checking in to verify conclusions - this act of interpretation can occur in a sensitive manner that retains as much of the essence of the teachings as possible. Furthermore, Kovach (2018) suggests that the academic process necessitates a re-storying, or retelling of the story, within the author's own personal context to disseminate information that is of potential value to the community.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research has utilized an Indigenous research orientation as informed by Hart (2010), Kovach (2018), Thomas (2014), and Wilson (2008) to learn about the SSSLAP and to explore Indigenous conceptualizations of criminalization and substance use in Winnipeg to collectively

articulate an alternative policy based in Indigenous Knowledge. It has utilized qualitative research methods as they are best suited to the exploration of the relational (fluctuating, co-created, interwoven) knowledge generation, and the nuanced and complex nature that the subject matter contains. Additionally, the interpretation of press releases and actions taken through the SSSLAP has sought to apply a critical interpretation, rather than an accounting of numerical or statistical data, for example. These modes of interpretation have enabled the exploration of concepts like target populations, implicit racism, and white supremacy. This research does not seek to describe the cause-and-effect connections, or current statistical conditions of substance use and criminalization in Winnipeg – in which case, a quantitative research orientation would have been better suited (Bloomberg, 2023).

As briefly mentioned above, the primary source of knowledge creation has been through semi-structured interviews/conversations. As Thomas (2014, as cited in Kovach, 2018) suggested, conversational methods engage in aspects of storytelling, which respects the fluidity of knowledge creation, as well as the interconnected, relational component of it – all of which are epistemologically consistent with Indigenous Knowledge creation. Through conversations, guided by me, initial questions guided the conversation, and the research-based, problematic power dynamics implicit in a researcher-researched dichotomy have been mitigated through the sharing of power in this format. Those who are participating in the research were able to provide as much or as little information as they saw fit. In congruence with Indigenous values, as Thomas puts it, storytelling "is rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and we must be patient and sit with the words" (p. 192, as cited in Kovach, 2018, p. 225).

The Indigenous research methods have incorporated what Garroutte (2003) referred to as "radical Indigenism", which necessitates the incorporation of spiritual and sacred elements into

the research process; honouring dreams, meditations, visions, sharing circles, storytelling, reciprocity, and other traditional practices as essential to the research process (as cited in Hart, 2010, p. 6).

STORY GATHERING

POLICY DOCUMENTS, CONVERSATIONS AND TALKING CIRCLES

The SSSLAP served as the focal document of analysis and has been explored through a critical assessment of press releases, legislative debates, and speeches, and supporting documentation on the announcements and application of the plan. The story-telling component of the research involved semi-structured conversations and a post-analysis collaborative review of a summary document (Appendix 6) facilitated through either a talking circle, in person meeting, or correspondence with the research participants – depending on their preference and availability. Finally, Lilian Bonito who facilitated the closing pipe ceremony also shared her thoughts on the summary document. This had intended to be included as a part of the talking circle, but there was an issue that prevented Lilian's attendance, so we made time to hold a separate pipe ceremony to maintain protocols in line with traditional ceremonial recommendations to close the research.

SEVEN VOICES

The knowledge creation component utilized relational knowledge collected through conversations with a cohort of seven research participants. Their eligibility criteria was based on participants' diverse knowledge and intimate relationship to the issues central to this thesis and included a minimum of five years of service for / within a local Indigenous community and self-identifying as Indigenous. This group represents a gender-diverse cohort with representation from within the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, participants with lived experience, and those with

diverse leadership experience. The reason for this selection criteria is that Indigenous individuals who have worked within/for local Indigenous communities and have multi-layered lived experiences are better able to speak to the experiences of those communities from multiple experiential perspectives. Additionally, from an anti-colonial perspective it was necessary for the research cohort to identify as Indigenous to provide diverse Indigenous Knowledge. Lastly, individuals were sought out who could provide diverse experiences from intersectionally marginalized communities who experience policy differently and possess knowledge that has been historically sidelined (NIMMIWG, 2019).

For this research, a snowball sampling was utilized for its practicality as well as being consistent with what Kovach (2018) referred to as "relational capital" and its necessity in conducting Indigenous research (p. 223-224). Namely, that one requires trust within the community, knowledge that the research is valued within the community, and a sense of understanding of cultural norms and values within it. As Bennett and Copenace (2020b) suggested in a lecture on research, *who you know* and *how you know them* is a means of gatekeeping into community; trust is earned through relationship, respect, and reciprocity. The hope was that, through an open-hearted, honest, and empowerment-based approach to the research that adheres to the norms of respect, reciprocity, relationship, and relevance, I displayed to the initial cohort that I am worthy of their trust – and that that trust could be communicated to other connections within the community who may also be willing to share insights into the research project.

A participant sample of this size was intended to provide diverse stories from which to interpret and weave knowledge from. Eligibility criteria were articulated as above because the diverse experience, passion, and relationship to the knowledge of the subject matter was helpful

in providing critical insights into some of the challenges, successful approaches, community assets and deficiencies that affect substance use and criminalization. Additionally, the participants' traditional Indigenous Knowledges bore a holistic orientation, relevant to addressing the issues. I was able to identify six initial participants based on the eligibility criteria. One was unable to participate, however after providing them with a poster outlining the nature and purpose of this project, they passed it along to a connection of theirs who was interested, willing, and met eligibility criteria to participate in this research. The final participant was also a connection of a research participant from the first recruitment circle who was brought in by the snowball recruitment method, in accordance to the ethics protocols of the project. Each of these participants participated in the interview process, but not all attended the talking circle.

During this research, I led a series of engagements (between 2-3), with each participant. The first engagement was a conversation intended to be an informal, unstructured, unrecorded but partly scripted meeting to introduce one another and establish relationship, introduce the project, provide an offering for the participant's engagement (elaborated upon below), discuss matters of research consent, confidentiality and anonymity (which will also be addressed further below), and to lay out plans for the research process. These interviews took less than an hour and took place at a location of the participant's choosing that provided sufficient privacy. Additionally, while all aspects of the conversation were important, the development of the relationship through sharing self-location was on the forefront of that relationship building (Kovach, 2009). This allowed those that did not previously know me to "situate and assess [my] motivations for the research", and to begin to engage in the relationship-based research (p. 98). These conversations were not recorded, as they were not intended to engage in the knowledge creation component of the research. However, five out of seven research participants elected to

complete the research interview in the same sitting, at the initial meeting. The process for the recorded interviews follows below.

The second conversations (or, as mentioned above – five of seven research participants' first meeting) were digitally recorded on a secure device, transcribed verbatim, and sent back to the participants for their corrections, desired omissions, and feedback. Feedback provided from the sessions was utilized to develop and refine the research process to be reflexive to the needs of the research participants, and to follow their instructions regarding the presentation of their insights. The interview was a semi-structured, in-depth interview with each individual participant. These meetings lasted between 45 minutes to 1½ hours, at a location that was comfortable for the research participant, and suitably private, to allow for recording, confidentiality, and non-interference. Carrier's (2000) contribution in Kovach's (2009) work suggested in-depth interviews are a valuable method to receive the stories of participants in qualitative research, allowing a great deal of information sharing, while also allowing some guidance by the interviewer. This created space for the relational co-creation of place-based knowledge through the story-telling process (Kovach, 2018).

The next interaction was in the format of a talking circle with three of seven research participants with the express purpose of reviewing, critiquing, and refining the alternative policy proposal. For the purposes of this meeting, a Summary Document for Research Participants was compiled that included background information on the SSSLAP, the alternative policy proposal, and areas for future research. The document was presented to the group in physical format and reviewed collectively (Appendix 6). The talking circle included those who were able to attend and consented to forgo anonymity and followed a similar process as the second interviews, including recording, transcription, and sending to participants for corrections, omissions, and

feedback. The talking circle was intended to provide ample space for exploration, feedback, and critique on the Indigenous-based alternative action plan – allowing participants to provide on-the-spot corrections, as well as suggesting final intentions for the work.

Those who were unable to attend the talking circle were provided with an email copy of the summarized document and provided an opportunity to receive an in-person presentation of the alternative policy and offered an opportunity to discuss further. Three participants were met on a one-to-one basis for in-person presentation of the research summary. One provided feedback via email following the meeting, one provided feedback on the spot, and the third had indicated they would provide email feedback but was unable to be reached for follow-up, despite several attempts over six weeks. Lastly, one participant provided email feedback, following an email that included the Summary Document. Input from this final stage was integrated into the final draft of the action plan, as well as the verification section following the discussion portion of this thesis. This process was valuable for both feedback and validation of the results (O'Connor & Gibson, 2003).

Lastly, I provided my contact information to all participants, to create additional opportunity for input outside of the 2-3 meetings, and to honour the relationship by making myself accessible to all research participants. However, there were no substantive conversations related to the research that occurred outside of the interviews.

The SSSLAP documents and the conversations with Indigenous participants were selected for the following reasons: 1.) the impact of the SSSLAP has a profound potential to impact Indigenous communities and therefore warrants a TribalCrit exploration of the materials; 2.) Indigenous voices must be consulted in matters that disproportionately affect Indigenous Peoples and must be prioritized in the research; 3.) my years of experience working with the

local Indigenous communities has provided me with insights and connections that will help connect these voices and knowledge to policy related applications.

PIPE-CARRIER CONSULTATION

During the closing pipe ceremony with Lilian Bonito, we also discussed the Summary Document for Research Participants (Appendix 6) and Lilian provided impressions that she thought may be helpful for refining the document further. Summary notes were taken following the pipe ceremony as recording of the pipe ceremony had not been approved and would have been culturally taboo. This input provided additional validation, and control over the project creation through the consultation of a Pipe Carrier.

LISTENING TO THE STORIES

As mentioned above, press releases and supporting documents, as well as semi-structured interviews/conversations/correspondence have been the primary means of connecting to knowledge for this research. A set of fundamental questions for research participants included: *what is your understanding of substance use in Winnipeg? What is the relationship between substance use and criminalization of communities? And, based on Indigenous ways of knowing, being, seeing, and doing, how would you address the issues of substance use and substance use-related crime in Winnipeg?* (Appendix 1). These questions guided the course of the conversations, but as was anticipated much of the interview content was developed through a general exploration of the ideas, in conversation with the participants.

SITTING WITH THE STORIES

BUILDING RELATIONSHIP WITH THE STORYTELLERS OF BOTH WORLDS

Once a collection of supporting documents for analysing the SSSLAP were collected, these documents were categorized into the three relative “pillars” outlined in the action plan

(enforcement, education, rehabilitation), placed into a physical matrix and critically analyzed for underlying themes based on the propositions of TribalCrit and explored on the likely impacts upon local Indigenous communities, and where possible matched with themes that emerged from the interviews.

The overall method undertaken for the data analysis used an emergent analysis, as offered by Morris (2006), an appropriate model for critical analysis and Indigenous-based research in that it incorporates both systematic and intuitive relational processes with the data. This process consisted of stages of coding, memoing, and concept charting. The coding occurred through a series beginning with (as mentioned above) categorizing which "pillar" of the SSSLAP the policy, implementation, press release, or program addresses. Secondly, once categorized "open coding" (Morris, 2006, p. 113) was utilized to identify patterns that emerged from the stories. While coding was compiled and completed, memoing occurred to connect the codes in relationship to one another (Morris, 2006, p. 175) and to the themes that emerged through the interviews with research participants (see below). Computer assisted software (Dedoose) was initially applied to help sort the stories and to augment the categorization, consistency, and analysis of information gathered. This process of coding and memoing facilitated "socialising anxiety," wherein the analysis of the stories created a natural tension, which precipitated a tendency towards the emergence of overarching propositions from the data, based on my own "intuitions and sensibilities" of the information (Morris, 2006, p. 174), especially as it related to the themes from the interviews. Codes and relevant quotations were printed and placed into a relational matrix, known as the concept chart to help identify relevant themes. This resulted in smaller parts of policy and process to be connected to broader critical concepts of rhetorical tendencies, credibility creation, and other emergent categories.

The process of engaging in deeper relationship with the stories from research participants proceeded along a similar trajectory as offered by Morris (2006) that was used for the policy analysis component. The process of coding, memoing, socializing anxiety, and concept charting provided a similar progression as outlined in the earlier analysis section, however due to the volume and depth of the research participants' stories, the process was more in-depth. This included a transcription process, aided by an artificial intelligence software (Otter.ai). Once the initial transcripts were completed, I reviewed each transcript for accuracy (listening along and providing corrections) before submitting them to research participants (as a password protected file) for review. Next, I printed copies of each interview and read through them, making notes and memos, which became the basis for initial coding. Those preliminary codes and highlighted sections were then uploaded onto the data analysis platform, Dedoose. The initial codes were cross-referenced to look for redundancies and overlap, whereby duplicate codes were subsumed under common labels, and irrelevant or less-pertinent quotes were removed from the noteworthy collection. Those codes were then exported for review and categorized under major themes from which to draw a narrative to create the foundation of the alternative policy proposal. After that, the coded excerpts were printed and placed into a physical matrix concept chart to identify the relationships between the codes and themes, drawing connections between them. At this point, I consulted with my Academic Advisor to review the coding and establish more concise parent themes under which the subthemes could be categorized. As a result of that process, and from the propositions of the socialized anxiety and the concept charting process, I was able to weave together the policy proposal, which I feel (and has been confirmed by the research participants) accurately conveys Indigenous-based methods to ameliorate substance use and criminalization of

communities, including guiding principles, and recommended areas for future research as suggested by the research participants.

The results of that process (the alternative policy proposal and recommendations for future research) were brought back to the research cohort for review and feedback (see Appendix 6). Feedback took the form of a talking circle, an in-person meeting, or electronic communication. From a Western qualitative research perspective, this process supported the validity and rigour of the research and provided opportunity for verification of the re-storying of this knowledge (Kovach, 2018). Participants were invited to review the knowledge gathered, the themes drawn from the research, and the resulting proposal. In addition, triangulation was utilized by comparing interpretations across interviews to assess consistency and identify outliers (O'Connor & Gibson, 2003) and additional literature was consulted to further validate the findings.

The talking circle and in-person meeting were both recorded, transcribed (using Otter.ai), reviewed, and verified by participants through the same process as outlined above. Electronic sources (emails) and the verified transcripts were then uploaded to Dedoose and coded. This coding process resulted in two main themes through a limited emergent analysis. I did not create a relational matrix for this coding review due to the relatively limited feedback received.

RE-STORYING THE STORIES

Kovach (2018) suggests that the ways in which we, as researchers, interpret, analyze, and write out our research is a practice of re-storying. That it is telling a story based on stories that have been told to us, reflected through our own gaze and refracted by our own experiences and backgrounds. The final product that is the diverse Indigenous Knowledge-based policy

framework to address substance use and criminalization of communities in Winnipeg is the re-storying of the narratives shared in this research process.

ETHICS

This research was conducted within an ethical framework that brings Western institutional ethics into dialogue with Indigenous ethical principles grounded in relationality, ceremony, and responsibility. Ethics were not treated as solely a procedural requirement, but as an ongoing, lived practice throughout the research process - from its ceremonial initiation, through the relational engagement to the knowledge shared and its re-storying, to the ceremonial closure, and extending beyond the completion of this thesis.

WESTERN ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Overall, this research was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the University of Manitoba and was reviewed and approved by the Fort Garry Research Ethics Board. Approval for the research was obtained in March of 2025, prior to any contact with research participants. Institutional ethics requirements outlined procedures related to informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity and the right to withdraw from the study.

Additionally, Wilson (2008) cautioned that consent processes and universal anonymity may not align with Indigenous epistemologies, thus consent in this study was approached as both a written and relational process. Participants were provided with written consent forms and were invited to determine how they wished to be identified in the research. Five participants chose to be referred to by first name, one participant chose to be referred to by their full name, and one participant elected to use a pseudonym. These choices were documented through written self-

identification declarations and were made in co-accordance with the requirements of the Research Ethics Board.

INDIGENOUS ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

KOOKOO / CULTURAL SUPPORT

Cultural guidance was a central ethical component of this research. The roles of Kookoo Dianne Cross and Lilian Bonito within the research process were distinct from those of Indigenous participation on my thesis committee and require explicit clarification. Their contributions were not academic in nature, but ceremonial, cultural, and ethical.

Kookoo Dianne held several crucial roles within the research process, including the integration and invitation of *Spirit* into the research through ceremony; providing guidance on appropriate approaches for interacting with research participants; maintaining proper customs within the community; and interpreting intuitive and non-physical forms of guidance, such as dreams, visions, and sentiments throughout the research process. She conducted a pipe ceremony to initiate the first phase of the research, establishing ethical intention and relational accountability at the outset. While she was unable to join me for the closing phase of the research, her guidance remained foundational throughout.

Lilian Bonito provided closure for the research and lifted her daughter's pipe - which was formerly her own - in ceremonial practice to close the research project. This ceremony honoured all those who had come along the research journey, both in spirit and in physical presence, and asked for guidance following completion of the project. As noted earlier, she also provided feedback on the summary document.

These ceremonial practices, protocols of engagement, and incorporation of tradition were intended to model the research as a relational and spiritual undertaking adherent to Indigenous cultural norms and ethical responsibilities. I felt very grateful and honoured for their inclusion.

HONOURING THE PROCESS

From an Indigenous ethical perspective, this research was understood as a process of knowledge recovery rather than knowledge discovery or creation. As Wilson (2008) notes, Indigenous Knowledge is not discovered or created but belongs to the cosmos and is merely carried by those who share it. As a participant in this research and knowledge recovery, I approached the participants and the knowledge they imparted with reverence, humility, and respect.

As per teachings I have received on Treaty 1 Territory, on November 21, 2020, I offered tobacco and asked for the guidance of my ancestors and the ancestors of the land we are on. I asked for their assistance in seeking wisdom, knowledge, relationship, and ideas that can provide healing and enhance the lives of all our relations within our city. I asked that the universe guide me to the hearts and minds of people who are willing to share their wisdom in a spirit of collaboration and healing. I asked these things in a spirit of love, gratitude, and respect. I will offer tobacco at the final conclusion of this process with gratitude to my many teachers who have come along my path, to the winds, waters, lands upon which this research has taken place, to the hearts, minds, voices and spirits of those who have walked this journey with me, and to ask that this research find its way to those who may make best use of it.

When I contacted participants, I made offerings (tobacco, cotton cloth and a handmade gift – see following section) whose approximate value was $60, plus a $50 cash honorarium at the time of their interview to honour their time in that process. Additionally, for joining the

talking circle component of the research project, or for the one-on-one follow up meetings, I provided the participants with a homegrown clove of garlic, a jar of homemade grape jelly that I harvested and made with my kids, and a cut of cotton cloth whose value is approximately $20. For those who attended the talking circle a feast was also provided for the meeting.

These offerings are informed by Elder Vern Dano (personal communication, November 18, 2020) who told me that, "if you're going to ask for people in the [Indigenous] community to share their knowledge it is a good idea to start to amass a 'giveaway bundle,'" as an offering for their sharing. I was encouraged to get meter lengths of single colour or printed cotton cloth and pouch tobacco for the offerings. Additionally, the Elder advised me to create handmade gifts to offer participants.

Kookoo Dianne's honorarium for involvement in the project involved a gift of tobacco, cotton cloth, and a handmade gift, as well as a $200 honorarium (as per the University of Manitoba Culture and Protocol guidelines) for her assistance in the pipe ceremony to initiate the research component. Lilian was also provided with tobacco, cotton cloth, a handmade gift, and a $200 honorarium for assisting with the closing pipe ceremony.

TOWARDS MIÝO-WÎCÉHTOWIN (GOOD RELATIONS) IN RESEARCH

Throughout the research process, participants were engaged to provide feedback on the knowledge gathered, the themes drawn from the research, and the subsequent Summary Document for Research Participants. This served three purposes. Firstly, it supported research validity from both Indigenous and Western perspectives by ensuring that teachings were not misinterpreted and that conclusions aligned with shared understandings, while prioritizing the authenticity of participants' voices (Wilson, 2008; Wilson & Hughes, 2019). Secondly, these conversations honoured the relationships that developed throughout the research process.

Thirdly, they offered the outcomes of the research ceremony back to participants as a means of enhancing their relationship to the work and raising collective consciousness (Wilson, 2008).

This approach reflects the Cree concept of *miýo-wîcêhtowin*, or "good relations" in research, which "ensures that research participants understand and accept how their teachings are represented" (Kovach, 2009, p. 48). Knowledge verification was thus relational rather than extractive and communicated mutual accountability.

RELATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY, RECIPROCITY, AND OCAP

The orientation of this research is intentionally away from deficit-focused research on Indigenous Peoples and toward embracing Indigenous perspectives that integrate knowledge with research, policy, and community priorities (Chilisa, 2019, as cited in Bloomberg, 2023). The research process involved an obligation to "all my relations" (Wilson, 2008, p. 177) and was grounded in relational engagement and commitment to Indigenous communities (Brayboy, 2009; Kovach, 2005, as cited in Hart, 2010).

The research has been guided by the four "R's" of Indigenous research: respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility (Bennett & Copenace, 2020). Respect for the participants who have agreed to participate in this research and the knowledge they carry. Relevance of the research, in terms of its applicability and intended benefit to the community it intends to serve. Reciprocity both in adhering to diverse traditional offerings, and in the sense of giving my time, effort, and energy in a reciprocal service towards the community that I and the research participants mutually serve. Lastly, responsibility to the research participants, and to all my relations in that, through this relationship we have been accountable to one another; my efforts have been committed in good faith, with good intentions, adequate guidance and input from members of diverse local Indigenous communities to reach an outcome that is in alignment

with our collective aims. I remain responsible and accountable to the research participants, and all of whom this thesis is intended as a service for – which is to say, all my relations.

This project also adhered to the First Nations research principles of Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP) (Schnarch, 2004). Knowledge shared through this research remains collectively owned and controlled by the participants. Control of this project was an ongoing practice throughout the research process, by trying to incorporate opportunities for input, feedback, correction, or omission wherever possible. Dissemination beyond the thesis committee has been permitted by each research participant, and each participant will receive a final copy of the thesis document for their own use. They may access it for any purpose, at any time.

Taken together, these ethical commitments position the research as a relational, accountable, community-oriented, and emancipatory process rather than an extractive academic exercise.

CHAPTER 5 – SSSLAP POLICY ANALYSIS RESULTS

This Results section synthesizes an analysis of 22 documents related to the Safer Streets Safer Lives Action Plan (SSSLAP), debates from the Manitoba Legislative Assembly, provincial press releases issued under the Pallister Government, and media coverage. Through relational engagement with these documents, two overarching themes emerged: *sentiments* – namely, *hostile* and *supportive* rhetoric; and *consultation* as a means of creating credibility and providing policy pretext. This chapter then outlines the SSSLAP's three policy pillars: enforcement, treatment, and education – including how they were framed, funded, and formalized across sources. These findings illuminate the affective tone and justifying logic underpinning the SSSLAP and provide a foundation for comparing the policy narratives with Indigenous participant perspectives.

REVIEWED DOCUMENTS

The review of relevant publications surrounding the *Safer Streets Safer Lives Action Plan* included nine transcripts from the Manitoba Legislative Assembly, four press releases from the Province of Manitoba under the Pallister Government, and eight news media publications (Appendix 2). Following the creation of a physical matrix of the relevant policy quotations, an analysis informed by TribalCrit revealed the following themes.

EMERGENT THEMES

The relational engagement with the documents, in consideration of the critical framework provided by TribalCrit revealed two main themes that I felt were relevant for this thesis. These themes were *sentiments*, and *consultation*. Sub-themes under sentiments included *hostility* and *support*.

In addition, for the purposes of this thesis, it seemed relevant to maintain a summary of details of the respective pillars of the SSSLAP (i.e., enforcement, treatment, and education)

through quotations from the speakers and writers and included alongside the participant themes in the discussion sections where relevant. This seemed the most useful incorporation of the data into the broader narratives of this research to compare and contrast policy approaches.

This next section will provide the summary articulations of the SSSLAP, followed by quotes to illustrate the themes mentioned above.

SSSLAP SUMMARY

In summary, many publications included reference to crime related interventions; bolstering rural (Billeck, 2019) and urban police presence, including increasing collaboration and networking opportunities amongst law enforcement agencies and business owners (Cullen, 2019, p. 429; Gordon, 2019), advancing civil forfeiture processes to make the apprehension of funds thought to be used for illicit purposes quicker and easier (Chartier, 2019), creating an *operations table* to have Winnipeg Police, RCMP, and private security sharing knowledge to address crime issues, and increasing rewards through the Crime Stoppers campaigns (Grabish, 2019; Manitoba Government, 2019c). The funding commitment was $10 million (Chartier, 2019, p. 5) – roughly ½ of the total budget of the Safer Streets Safer Lives Action Plan. These implementations represent the "enforcement" pillar of the SSSLAP.

Concrete commitments to rehabilitation and mental health (i.e., the "treatment" pillar of the SSSLAP) were illustrated through $3.5 million in contributions to the Bruce Oake Recovery Centre, as well as the expansion of emergency detox beds, addictions treatment beds (Manitoba Government, 2020), rapid access to addictions recovery and detox programs in rural areas (Friesen, 2019b), and second stage housing for those exiting treatment who require secure, sober living accommodations (Aldrich, 2019). Furthermore, the PC's pledged $3.5 million towards mental health services at the Health Sciences Centre, in the form of addictions and mental health

support as well as enhanced security (Rosen, 2020), and also a commitment to building a detox facility for those struggling with methamphetamine addiction, where they could receive supports from mental health professionals for up to 4 days (Froese, 2019). The specific funding numbers across other programs were quite vague, but included diversionary programs for youth "in trouble with the law" to receive mental health and addictions support, as well as "improving mental health and addictions services" based on recommendations from the VIRGO report, the Illicit Drug Task Force, and the Community Wellness and Public Safety Alliance (Manitoba Government, 2019c, para 3).

The commitments to education and reformation of educational programming (the third pillar of the SSSLAP) was articulated by Cliff Cullen, who suggested that the provincial government would educate youth on the hazards of illicit drug use through "...some videos respecting drug use.." as well as "...redesigning the curriculum within the K-to-12 system... so... each student... [has] exposure to education... [on] mental health and illicit drug use" (2019a, p. 430). Similar vague commitments were made elsewhere in news reports (Froese, 2019), however throughout the publications, there was no mention of the costs of updating the educational curriculum, the specific educational materials, or what would be included in this program beyond the broad strokes mentioned above.

While there were other commitments to law enforcement, mental health, addictions, treatment and educational services during the years that followed the rollout of the Safer Streets Safer Lives Action Plan, they were not specifically emergent from the plan and so were omitted from this review.

THEME #1 - SENTIMENTS

Throughout the media coverage, legislative discourse, and press releases the emotional content acted as the spear shaft for the pointed tip that was the policy recommendation. Each sentimental tone had weight, momentum and direction, guiding the reader / listener's attention to intended conclusions, which supported the points of the policy proposals.

SUBTHEME 1A - HOSTILITY

Hostile phrasing was noted significantly throughout the supporting documents. Of the 22 separate documents nearly half expressed overt expressions of hostility as the driver for enhanced criminalization of communities. Explicitly, Provincial Administrator Chartier spoke of "[bringing] drug dealers to justice" (2019, p. 5); MLA Audrey Gordon mentioned "...[implementing] the Safer Streets Safer Lives Action Plan to *crack down* on drug dealers who are victimizing our communities" (emphasis added) (2019, p. 32). MLA Andrew Smith wrote the same quote verbatim for a Winnipeg Free Press article in December of 2019, adding that individuals are "...wreaking havoc on our neighbourhood" (2019, paras. 3-4). Health Minister Cameron Friesen referred to increased substance use as a "scourge" in the province (2019, p. 77). Austin Grabish, writing for the CBC described the plan to "...spend $10 million to bring drug dealers to justice..." and to "...see resources to bring drug dealers to justice beefed up" (2019, paras. 1-5).

With slightly more nuance, Justice Minister Cliff Cullen stated that "...mental health and addictions issues in society these days... are intertwined with criminal activity" (2019, p. 430). During the same speech he also indicated that the action plan wants to support people to "...get themselves back into a... useful part of society" (p. 430). MLA James Teitsma stated that the government's role is to "...discourage choices that... destroy public safety..." recommending judicial intervention (2019, p. 432).

When reviewing the documents, to some extent one could *read-in* hostility to most of the enforcement measures within this action plan, but for the sake of this illustration the quotes provided above sufficiently illustrate the sentiment as an overarching distain and hostile posture towards individuals who use substances, implicitly tying the behaviour to criminal activity.

SUBTHEME 1B - SUPPORT

Of the 22 documents, 14 provided supportive rhetoric around individuals who are struggling with substance use, with special regard for youth. The Administrator of the Province at the time, Chief Justice Richard Chartier spoke of the development of a "cross government hub... to direct youth in trouble with the law to appropriate community programs and services, including mental health and addictions" (2019, p. 5). Audrey Gordon mentioned "[helping] at-risk youth get away from crime... [and] supporting them as they seek a better life" (2019, p. 32). She added, "...the justice system will be the last resort for youth in care" (2019, p. 32). Justice Minister Cullen endorsed the expansion of "StreetReach programming in Thompson... [enhancing] access to services... [and increasing] protection and safety for sexually exploited youth" (2019, p. 165). His references to updating the educational programming to discourage substance use was similarly supportive of youth, emphasizing the importance of getting out anti-drug messaging, "to individuals, especially the youth, not to get involved in drugs and drug use..." (2019, p. 430) The Provincial Government's press release on June 1, 2020 contained a lengthy quote from Scott, Anne, and Darcy Oake – founders of the Bruce Oake Recovery Centre that was very humanizing to *the families of* individuals caught in substance use. "Our first-born son, Bruce, lost his battle with addiction... [we hope] other families could be spared such a tragic outcome" (Manitoba Government, 2020).

Similarly to the *reading-in* of hostility into initiatives that recommend law-enforcement approaches to substance use challenges, I felt compelled to *read-in support* with the expansion of mental health and addictions services (mentioned in 10 documents). Overall, the tone is compassionate, caring, and conveys a desire to help those in need.

THEME #2 - CONSULTATION

Consultation was a noteworthy theme from the SSSLAP supporting documents due to its repetition as a talking point. The three consultative bodies mentioned specifically were the Illicit Drug Task Force (mentioned in one news article, two press releases, and seven legislative transcripts), The VIRGO Report (an independent report conducted on the state of addictions and mental health resources in Manitoba, was mentioned in 1 news article and six legislative transcripts), The Community Wellness and Public Safety Alliance (CWPSA) (mentioned in five legislative transcripts), and the Manitoba Police Commission (mentioned in one news article and 10 legislative transcripts).

References to the VIRGO Report and CWPSA tended to recommend enhancements of mental health, detox and rehabilitation programming. MLA Friesen indicated, "...acting on the advice of the VIRGO Report... [and] the Illicit Drug Task Force... We're creating things like supportive housing units... expanding flexible withdrawal management services... Rapid Access to Addictions Medicine... and much more" (2019c, p. 641). The Provincial Government's (2019b) press release recommended, "enhancing access to... mental health and addictions supports... specialized trauma counselling... supportive recovery housing beds... and support for at-risk families..." because of recommendations from the VIRGO Report and CWPSA.

Recommendations from the Police Commission and other police forces tended towards law-enforcement enhancements. In her throne speech, Audrey Gordon stated, "We will respond

to the recommendations of the Manitoba Police Commission to make Winnipeg communities safer... [including] better enforcement, greater coordination... and increased resources for the public safety investigations unit..." (2019, p. 32). Cliff Cullen mentioned the enforcement strategy "...was put together in consultation with police forces ...and ...a good... informed team within Justice" (2019a, p. 429). He later added that including the Police Commission's input to "...review the situation and make some recommendations around public safety in downtown Winnipeg" (2019a, p. 430) was underway. In a press release addressing liquor store thefts, Cullen also indicated Operation Safe Streets (a police coordination and data sharing process and a part of SSSLAP) would include "...the right people... Winnipeg Police Service, RCMP and other representatives from law enforcement..." (Manitoba Government, 2019a, paras. 2-3). In the same press release outlining Operation Safe Streets, MLA Wharton added, "Our government is committed... to addressing theft, reducing violence, and improving mental health and addictions in our province" (para. 7).

The Illicit Drug Task Force was cited to support treatment and mental health options on some occasions and enforcement initiatives on others.

Taken in combination these statements provide a robust veneer of vetted professionals weighing in on the best practices advanced in the SSSLAP. They convey a type of legitimacy and thoughtfulness to the process of policy creation.

SUMMARY

This section summarizes findings from the document analysis of materials related to the Safer Streets Safer Lives Action Plan. Legislative debates, press releases, and media coverage revealed the emergence of two central themes: *sentiments*, expressed through both *hostile* and *supportive* rhetoric; and *consultation*, which functioned to establish legitimacy for policy

priorities. The section also outlines how the SSSLAP's pillars (enforcement, treatment, and education) were framed and resourced, exhibiting an emphasis on enforcement, with some representation in treatment, and few remarks on education. These findings clarify the affective tone and policy logic of the SSSLAP and set the stage for comparison with Indigenous participant perspectives.

CHAPTER 6 – PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS

This chapter engages with the Indigenous perspectives as articulated through the in-depth interviews with seven Indigenous leaders working across cultural, therapeutic, justice, harm reduction, and community-based fields. These perspectives are presented through a relational narrative that centres Indigenous ways of knowing, being, seeing, and doing, and are organized using a river metaphor to illustrate the emergent themes.

The three main themes comprising the structure of this section are: *the colonial undertow of white waters*, which situates substance use and criminalization within ongoing colonial and neo-colonial forces; *where two rivers meet*, which explores the tensions and possibilities that arise when Indigenous and Western paradigms intersect; and *the great river ahead*, which articulates Indigenous-led visions for alternative, holistic policy responses and governmental processes. Collectively, these findings situate colonialism as a root cause of present harms, critique current policy approaches, and advance the diverse Indigenous Knowledge-based Circle of Care as a relational, culturally grounded framework for addressing substance use and community wellbeing.

SEVEN PERSPECTIVES – PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

The research participants chosen for this project were leaders within their fields of expertise. The titles they held within their places of employment varied (e.g., program manager, executive director, CEO, independent contractor, etc.), but the individuals recruited for this project all tended to be in leadership roles. The fields were very diverse, but included cultural facilitation and spiritual work, therapeutic support, community advocacy and partnership development, justice, community building, harm reduction, and education. Each brought a profound depth of knowledge, and generously shared their lived experiences, wisdom, and

insights with a humbling clarity and strength. Participants ranged in age from early 20's to mid-60's with a median age in the late 30's. Two participants were female-identifying, five male-identifying all of whom self-identify as being from diverse Indigenous backgrounds (First Nation and Metis from across Manitoba and Ontario). Their names, as they chose to be identified in their consent forms were Christin, Damon, Dell Ducharme, Horseman, Josh, Levi, and Quinn. Because some of them have requested to only be referred to by their first names, I will not connect their demographics to their names in order to maintain their anonymity as requested.

STORIES & THEMES

In reviewing the interviews and seeking narrative cohesion between them, the imagery of a water system began to occur to me. Through this metaphor, the parent themes that emerged from the stories concerning substance use and community criminalization were broadly conceptualized as 1. *the colonial undertow of white waters* (precipitating factors); 2. *the rivers meet* (present conditions and factors to consider), 3. *and the great river ahead* (opportunities for a better path together). Within the first parent theme *the colonial undertow of white waters*, three sub-themes are included: 1. *colonialism's current* (colonialism as a root cause); 2. *broken canoes and stolen paddles* (outcomes of historical colonialism); 3. and *the perpetual roil of neo-colonialism* (modern systemic neo-colonialism). Under the sub-theme of *the perpetual roil of neo-colonialism* are two further micro-themes, *neo-colonial (in)justice* and *deliberate lack of governmental / systemic accountability and flexibility*. Within the second parent theme, *where two rivers meet*, the two sub-themes include: *the lay of the land* (modern paradigms), and *where rivers meet, opportunities lie*. The final parent theme, *the great river ahead* included the sub-themes: *maps and guideposts* (governmental and administrative recommendations), and *the four quadrants of the Circle of Care* (the alternative policy proposal), which can be further

understood as: homefires (families and homes), restoring the sacred heart (cultural care and the restoration of cultural traditions), hands held in community, and support through the seasons (continuity of care across systems and lifespans). This subtheme concludes with the guiding principles of the Circle of Care is the section entitled *from the eagle's perch*. Finally, the concluding themes based on participant feedback are entitled *echoes of the original problem, paths forward* and *closing ceremony and pipe-carrier consultation* (see Figure 6-1 for complete thematic visual overview).

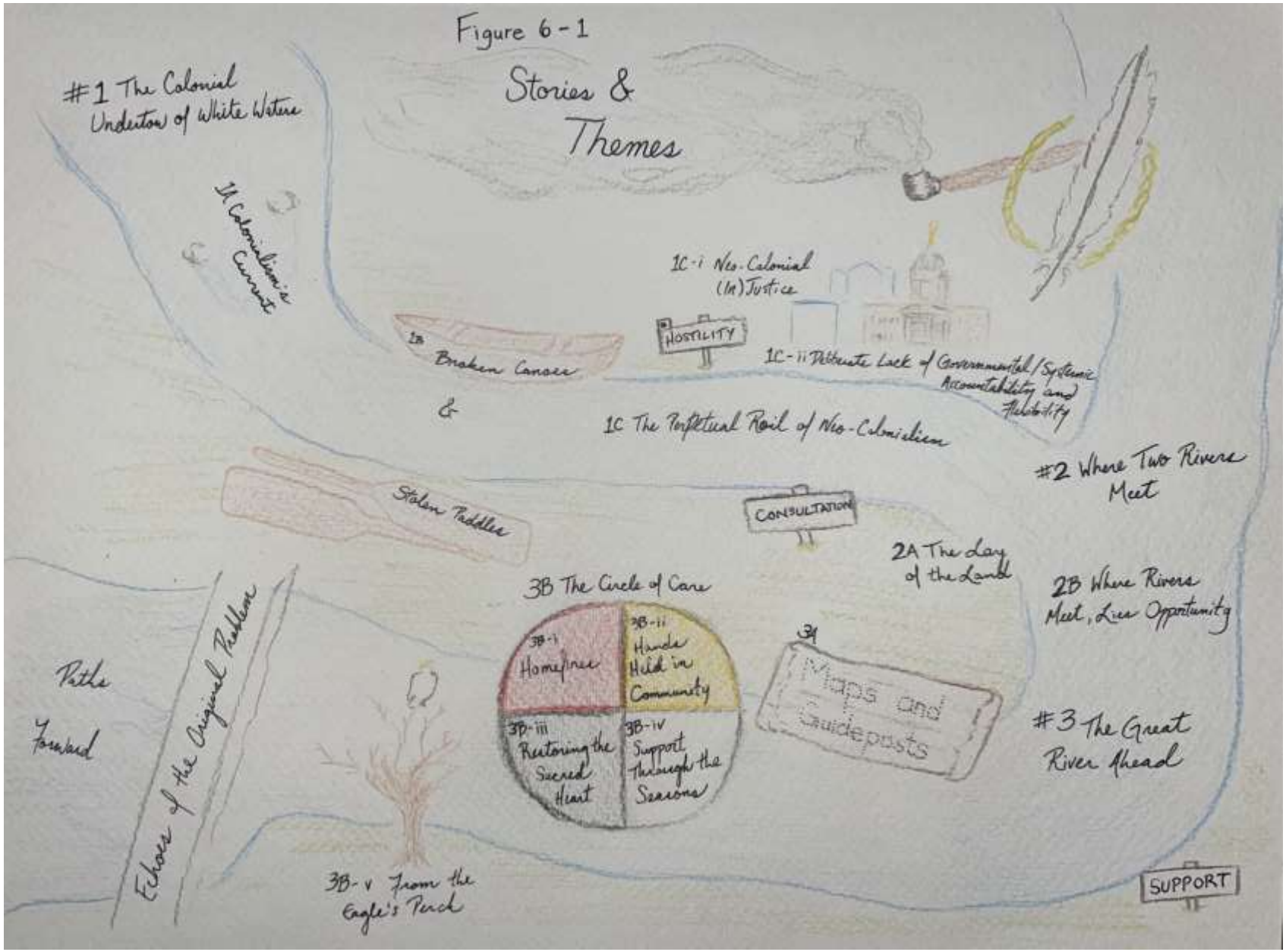
Figure 6 - 1
Stories & Themes
#1 The Colonial Undertow of White Water
1A Colonialism's Current
1B Broken Canoes
&
Stolen Paddles
1C-i Neo-Colonial (In)Justice
HOSTILITY
1C-ii Deliberate Lack of Governmental/Systemic Accountability and Reliability
1C The Perpetual Reel of Neo-Colonialism
#2 Where Two Rivers Meet
CONSULTATION
2A The Lay of the Land
2B Where Rivers Meet, Lies Opportunity
3A Maps and Guideposts
3B The Circle of Care
3B-i Homefires
3B-ii Hands Held in Community
3B-iii Restoring the Sacred Heart
3B-iv Support Through the Seasons
3B-v From the Eagle's Perch
Paths Forward
Echoes of the Original Peoples
#3 The Great River Ahead
SUPPORT

THEME #1 – THE COLONIAL UNDERTOW OF WHITE WATERS

The imagery of white water, the churn and roil, rocky hazards protruding from the foam, the ever-present undertow is a fitting metaphor for the stories that emerged through these narratives in the interviews. The term "white water" is a double-entendre that connotes the nature of colonialism as an unnavigable current that places one in mortal danger as a white-water rapid does, and that it is also informed by *white,* Western, Eurocentric values with the intention of maintaining the hegemonic status quo. This section explores the three sub-themes of colonialism.

SUBTHEME 1A: COLONIALISM'S CURRENT

Conversations with research participants about substance use and criminalization of communities always held colonization as the foundation for understanding the present challenges. Dell Ducharme provided the broad, but articulate definition of colonization: "...another world comes... dismisses what is...[disempowers] the people altogether, and ...[disregards] their traditions and culture." Research participants cited the impacts of the *Indian Act*, the Indian Residential School System, the 60's scoop and other self-legitimizing colonial initiatives for the stripping away of culture, language, land, traditions, and relationship (both within and between Indigenous communities, as well as their relationship to the land and cosmos – which is rooted, and roots one in culture, language, and traditions). Colonization was "legitimized" and solidified through legal mechanisms defined and articulated by the Crown. Dell summarized, "...they made the rules... [and] they brought in the power to enforce the laws."

According to all the research participants, these impacts are foundational to creating the conditions for disproportionate struggles with substance among Indigenous communities, and for the historic and present criminalization of Indigenous communities.

SUBTHEME 1B – BROKEN CANOES AND STOLEN PADDLES

All the research participants identified that the legacy of the policies enacted throughout the colonization of Canada precipitated the modern disparities in outcomes related to health, mental health, victimization, poverty, and social well-being. Dell summarized the situation in the following quote:

> "...when you look at that walk that places a particular population into the category of being abused but highly vulnerable, ...not having enough resources, ...education, ...healthy attachments. [It] leads to ...trauma, issues around identity, self esteem, access to resources ... [and] if we bring in intergenerational trauma and epigenetics, poor environments, lack of resources, poor attachments, deaths ..., accidents ..., losses all the time, sense of helplessness... Individuals are going to need to cope."

However, as the research participants identified, both historically and in modernity, access to the culturally appropriate means of healing and recovering were/are not made available to Indigenous communities at a meaningful scale. The traditional means to heal, and recover, have been legally suppressed, under-funded, or unsupported by the hegemony. Simultaneously, three participants also identified the deliberate sabotaging of Indigenous communities through the introduction of alcohol, after criminalizing traditional healing modalities (e.g., Sundance ceremony).

Research participants were very cognizant of the temporal proximities of the historic harms of colonialism. As Quinn articulates, "the last residential school closed in 1996, and so most of us are only... a generation or two, or sometimes... not even that removed from residential school."

In summary, colonialism and the trauma it wrought, combined with the disintegration of Indigenous ways of healing, and the provision of substances to cope laid the groundwork for prevalence of substance use disorders, disproportionately impacting Indigenous Peoples. Or, as Levi succinctly stated, "...problematic substance use for many Indigenous communities... is a symptom of colonialism."

SUBTHEME 1C: THE PERPETUAL ROIL OF NEO-COLONIALISM

Neo-colonialism is commonly understood as the ways in which hegemonic (in this case: white, Western) systems, in opposition to Indigenous paradigms, perpetuate their power and control, often through covert means and coded language, but also through overt policies of oppression, subjugation, and de-prioritization of Indigenous communities' wellbeing. Within the notion of neo-colonialism research participants' concerns were surrounding police and the justice system, and a deliberate lack of governmental / systemic accountability and flexibility.

NEO-COLONIAL (IN)JUSTICE. Five of the conversations featured prominent narratives surrounding the justice system. From early colonial abuses of power and violence, through the confinement of Indigenous and Métis leaders in Stony Mountain during the Red River Rebellion, up to present day disproportionate criminalization, state sanctioned violence, and imprisonment of Indigenous Peoples, the justice system in our country was mentioned as a well-known, powerful neo-colonial force. Levi observed, "you see the way that people utilize and weaponize crime against Indigenous Peoples and people who use drugs all the time." Research participants unanimously describe the present justice system as ineffective for addressing crime (except for isolated restorative justice programs), harmful and damaging to those who experience it, and a net detriment to the community, with particularly negative impact

upon Indigenous Peoples. As Quinn noted, “if putting people in cages and treating them like animals was going to work, it would have worked by now.”

Four research participants also directly identified the ways in which the justice system does not serve or protect Indigenous Peoples in the same way it protects non-Indigenous communities. Participants spoke of the way equal behaviours, differentiated only by skin colour or appearance, resulted in vastly different outcomes. Quinn stated, “safety in... downtown... is very different when you’re a drunk white male versus and Indigenous person who’s drinking ... white men need a safe walk to their car... Indigenous people... [are] in the way or causing problems.” They’re seen as a hazard in the community, to be policed, surveilled, or at the very least, unprotected. Notably, this exact example was also provided by Premier Pallister, highlighting the need to enact downtown safety measures proposed in the SSSLAP (Pallister, 2019, p. 37). This coincided with several participants noting the way that Indigenous violence is often not seen as a crime worthy of police intervention or protection. As Levi states, Indigenous victims of interpersonal violence especially among substance using communities, “don’t have any actual recourse... that [they] can rely on. The system doesn’t have [their] back...”

Also, pertaining to unequal service under the law, four research participants spoke of the way in which the justice system is largely a mechanism to protect private property of wealthy (predominantly) white classes, while not providing that same protection to Indigenous Peoples. Levi state, “...the only difference ...between resource accumulation in the way... people who use crime or... who use drugs... and wealthy people who game the system is their social status.” He added, “...if Canadian society had that type of understanding ...about property crime... then the Land Back movement would be stronger than what it is.” Another example cited was the way poor communities are penalized or surveilled more severely than those in wealthy areas,

"...people who live in Tuxedo or Lindenwoods... they seem to... avoid consequence for the same behaviours [as people from less affluent communities]," as Quinn put it.

From police interactions to courtroom deliberations, research participants referred to the justice system as having a reputation to demonize, vilify, and act with extreme prejudice towards Indigenous Peoples. Horseman had shared a story (Appendix 3) where Winnipeg Police put on Kevlar gloves before engaging in an unsolicited interaction with his own children (between the ages of 7-13) who were raking leaves in their own yard. He described the way in which he has had to teach his children for *their* own safety, "'[The Winnipeg Police] are not your friends. You do not trust them.' And that's what we have to instill in our children until those relationships change." These lessons being shared were not a marginal perspective. In fact, four of the research participants had shared stories of disproportionate violence being committed against Indigenous Peoples through the justice system, including racial stereotyping, over-policing, increased surveillance, disproportionately severe sentences and incarcerations, as well as outright violence and failure to protect.

DELIBERATE LACK OF GOVERNMENTAL / SYSTEMIC ACCOUNTABILITY AND FLEXIBILITY. While most of the frames of reference for neo-colonialism up to this point are "active," in the sense that they include some action perpetuating the colonial project, where government accountability is concerned, inactivity or lack of follow through tends to be where the research participants identified the main issue. For example, four of the research participants mentioned the way in which government has participated in countless projects of consultation, investigation, public inquiries and so forth on the systemic disparities and harms experienced by Indigenous Peoples but has ultimately failed to follow through on most of the commitments that have come as a result of these projects. Dell mentioned with respect to the

Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action, and Children's Special Allowance settlements:

> We go through everything where there's a little bit of oomph. What the government does, they do everything just to squash it. They don't follow through, ...and you've got to sue them. ...It's always government rules we're not going to do it. Government rules we're not going to do it. We're going to give, and we're going to take and then we're going to take some more.

Additionally, there are no adequate accountability mechanisms to hold government accountable to commitments they make. As Christin describes, "accountability definitely needs to be there and called out when it doesn't happen... we don't trust the government, because ...that follow through was not honoured...." These sentiments lead to overall skepticism among research participants as to whether governments have any good faith desire to make meaningful change with respect to the wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples and communities that use substances, or only if they only need to *appear* to be doing something.

THEME 2 – WHERE TWO RIVERS MEET

As I was exploring the river metaphor within this project, the idea of two rivers meeting was a natural connection of the materials discussed: the river of colonial forces, and that of diverse Indigenous-based knowledge. This section will explore the sub-themes identified as the *lay of the land*, and *where rivers meet, lies opportunity*.

SUBTHEME 2A – THE LAY OF THE LAND

This subtheme can be thought of as articulations of the overarching modern paradigm and social climate, identification of some of the challenges of modernity, broader discussions about the possibility of decolonizing a system that is fundamentally colonial and whether or not that

can be done, while still recognizing the collective need to change course as members of a singular human community.

Six research participants cited mainstream cultural norms and value systems, as well as the proliferation of technology, and in particular social media, as a corrosive force in society and a bi-product of the disintegration of organic, person-to-person communities. Leadership roles in society tend to be delegated to individuals who are financially successful, but not necessarily of good moral compass. As Damon puts it, "the love of money has brought real change to our society, and not in good ways." He adds that "...Indigenous ways of knowing, being, seeing, and doing... is anathema" to much of modern, financially-driven cultural values.

Within this context, five research participants also spoke of the complex climate of trying to maintain one's Indigenous identity, within the confines of modernity. Three participants spoke of the need to navigate "living in two worlds" and the struggle to retain one's values, within the impositions of modern life. Horseman quoted a friend of his, who had shared, "...one of the hardest things to do in this world is [to] be a traditional man, because the world doesn't allow you the time you need to take care of yourself, your spirit, your family and your homefire." Thus, participants spoke of pressures from within Indigenous communities, as well as the hegemonic cultural structures to *pick a side*.

It was within this thread of conversation that a *tug-of-war* between paradigms was also identified. Western hegemonic ideas of financial prioritization, individualism, favouring Euro-centric models of care, justice, and knowledge – versus Indigenous ideas of reciprocity, interconnection, location of oneself in relationship to the world around us, guided by notions of relational obligation and integrating concepts like spirit and cultural tradition into daily life.

All of the participants shared some optimism about being able to integrate and inculcate aspects of Indigenous culture into the hegemonic systems, but four of the seven participants leaned more towards skepticism. Quinn articulated, "...there's a huge shift in philosophy that needs to happen that is nearly impossible... especially in government." She was by no means an outlier in this perspective, especially in consideration of the history of governmental betrayal against Indigenous communities, in particular.

SUBTHEME 2B – WHERE RIVERS MEET, LIES OPPORTUNITY

Despite these challenges and antagonistic factors, all of the participants entertained a possibility for a better path forward for all of us in this shared community. Damon suggested in a broad sense,

> ...I think the door has opened for Indigenous leaders to truly change this country for the better, but we've got to walk through it. ...the introduction of some Indigenous ways of knowing, being, seeing, doing to the structure... would make it a better country.

Each of the research participants shared ideas based on their unique experiences and expertise, grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing, being, seeing, and doing, and offered their own form of medicine throughout this project in a spirit of genuine help and care. Dell suggested, "if we could remove the restraints of government and funding and Western [ways] of thinking and move to more traditional sense- I think not only First Nation would benefit. I think the rest of the population would, too."

Another example from Josh's work in social rehabilitation recommended the scaffolding of "lateral empathy" through community walks as a means of healing from trauma and enhancing community connection. Quinn offered solutions of accepting cultural practices as a mode of restorative justice. Levi shared those sentiments and also spoke of the possibility of

integrating Indigenous cultural norms within homeless encampments as a way of building resilience, restoring cultural practice, and relational wellbeing in the community. Horseman spoke of the opportunity that lies within ceremony as a broad antidote to the social and historical ills that affect our collective communities. Dell referred to continuums of care (bridging gaps across service and needs areas), ceremonial practices for healing historical pains, and the opportunity for broad wellness. Christin spoke of the opportunity of cultivating positive self-regard, identity and community on and off reserve as a means of bolstering collective resilience. Damon referred to the potential for collaboration between Indigenous Peoples to bring cultural and epistemological solutions to many of the ills of modernity. They each offered numerous opportunities for integrating Indigenous ways of knowing, being, seeing and doing to ameliorate community hardship related to substance use and criminalization.

There was overlap between their ideas, and each, despite skepticism and historical and ongoing adversity caused by hegemonic forces within mainstream society, held a sense of hope and a palpable knowledge that there are genuine, potent solutions within Indigenous ways of knowing, being, seeing and doing.

THEME 3: THE GREAT RIVER AHEAD

Within the river metaphor, beyond the meeting of the rivers there's a vision that is possible; one that integrates Indigenous Knowledges into mainstream systems of addressing substance use and criminalization of communities. This theme explores those possibilities through two subthemes: *maps and guideposts,* and *the four-quadrants of the Circle of Care,* which is comprised of *the homefire, hands held in community, restoring the sacred heart,* and *support through the seasons.*

SUBTHEME 3A – MAPS AND GUIDEPOSTS

The research participants suggested three clear forms of remediation to build a foundation for a path forward: government accountability, legitimate consultation (in contrast to "tokenism"), and autonomy and self-governance.

A common subtext within the theme of accountability and establishing a better path forward was the notion of flexibility from government. A path of genuine collaboration and cooperation requires at least some flexibility, and the capacity to think beyond existing policy considerations. As Quinn outlined, "It's really hard to get people to step outside of that [hegemonic framework of understanding] and just hear... maybe there's a different way that we could do this, or...maybe we could try ...something new, because ...policy can be changed, right?" Each of the research participants identified that adherence to antiquated norms and maintaining status quo orientations towards how we collectively operate, and how we address the challenges we face in our communities is a significant perpetuator of harms and an antagonist against community wellness. Dell referred to this as the "elephant in the room" of governmental policy.

These sentiments dovetail well into the realm of legitimate consultation. Comments surrounding legitimate consultations interrogated the idea of tokenism, recognizing that it is a tactic of appearing to obtain informed consent, while neglecting to obtain a *mutually* desired outcome between Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders, subordinating the interests of Indigenous Peoples. Examples that were provided by four participants included community consultations where the concerns of the community fall on deaf ears; when agencies claim to be informed by Indigenous values or have Indigenous representation, but lack accountability measures; or when projects are deemed "Indigenous led," but have no clear criteria on what that means, so fall prey to exploitation by non-Indigenous interests. As Dell stated, "you put people

into a system. It's token, and they have no power. And whatever power they may have, it's still based in Western white law." Additionally, four participants recommended some semblance of the idea of mandated Indigenous representation in positions of power, with equal authority to non-Indigenous counterparts. Horseman noted, "if people were really looking for meaningful change, they would start filling these [policy / governmental] tables with responsible Indigenous people, for and against [the given policy]." Similarly, Damon suggested the need for "shared leadership structures, where you don't have the dominant... king or the queen... I think we have to find a way to put that behind us... to create more shared leadership structure."

This connects to the way four participants highlighted that integration of Indigenous traditions and Indigenous Knowledges into the operations of a government, agency, or program can become disempowered if it is not understood why it is important, how it is important, or the meaning of the practice. Quinn said, "if the impact of [the integration of an Indigenous practice] isn't understood at the top...the things that we're doing ... are just ...a decorative addition... rather than informing the foundation of them." The remedy for this form of tokenization, as outlined by four research participants, is to engage in good faith consultations, to take the time to understand what's been shared, and to implement the recommendations as they have been outlined.

Lastly, as it relates to autonomy, six participants described some form or other of Indigenous authority and autonomy, either in the form of leadership and decision-making power, autonomy of design and control over funding for programming. In very concrete terms, Dell stated that the "only way to [integrate and implement Indigenous Knowledges] would be having traditional people in [government / administrative / authoritative] positions who have equal power. Period." Four others specifically pointed to a need for government to "get out of the

way" and provide space and adequate funding for Indigenous Peoples to plan, organize, and implement their own strategies for addressing issues, without the caveats and conditions imposed upon them through hegemonic authorities. Levi provided a fantastic example of the potential for Indigenous Peoples to create and facilitate their own healthcare provision, as described in an anecdote on Covid vaccination programs in Northern Manitoba, which were designed and implemented by Indigenous Peoples, for Indigenous Peoples (see Appendix 5). He offered, "we [Indigenous Peoples] will very actively engage in our own healthcare and... make good health decisions if we can trust the system."

SUBTHEME 3B – THE CIRCLE OF CARE

This next section relates to focussed intervention points - areas which resounded as fundamental to addressing the root causes of substance use and criminalization of community members. In analysing the interviews, the holistic picture of community wellness seemed to have a natural division into a four-quadrant model (like the Medicine Wheel) of understanding which will be elaborated upon below. They are: *homefires, hands held in community, restoring the sacred heart,* and *support through the seasons*.

HOMEFIRES. The "homefire" was a term Horseman used to encapsulate not only one's home and family, parents, children and extended family, but also the values and culture, the relationships and stability, as well as the health of both physical and non-physical resources, and nourishment within. In articulating this foundational role, Horseman stated, "everything is structured around the homefire. Everything." This concept, I began to realize, underscored and was interwoven in the foundational concerns of all of the participants. Damon spoke of the leaders' and parents' biggest challenge: "...cultivating the knowing of each Indigenous child that they have to learn to live in two worlds." Adding also that due to the challenges left in the wake

of generations of apprehensions and cultural dislocation that, "...we have children raising children." He concluded, that to address intergenerational struggles and substance use challenges, "It really comes back to... the family."

With respect to some of these areas of concern, four of the participants spoke of the child welfare system and the ways in which the modern system is dysfunctional and is a source of the perpetuation of historical trauma into the present. In opposition to the present system, Dell offered, "What would be ideal is that you begin to put the money back into the families, and ...as best as possible... families stay together." He additionally suggested creating safety networks for youth, so that they could have multiple familial and community resources to utilize as safe spaces before resorting to apprehension and placement in care. Quinn elucidated to similar notions when she spoke of informal support networks as "valid networks of care... that are intricate...[with] a lot of knowledge and wisdom." Christin also spoke of taking a strengths-based approach to bolster internal resources in the family, focussing on the positive pillars within the family as anchors to a positive framing of where one comes from. Horseman, Christin and Dell spoke of the need for healed and healing parents to become the role models for children, to set examples for better ways forward.

Two participants also spoke of the need for healing services across genders and ages – noting that services often attend to the most vulnerable (e.g., women, children, non-gender conforming, etc.), but neglect Indigenous (cis)men who they suggested are often underserved, thought of as "undeserving" of support, and neglected as an essential component to the holistic wellness of the homefire. In articulating equal importance, Christin stated, "when men heal, women heal. When women heal, men heal, and their children heal. They all heal together." She also noted that this healing then enables members of the homefire to take up traditional roles as

providers, role models, care givers, healers, and productive members of their homefire unit. These sentiments were echoed in other conversations as well, not in the sense of *prioritizing* care for men but tending to all members of the homefire with love, respect, and kindness.

This healing and provision of care for every member of the community, in the ways that each need at their particular time in life, was seen as essential for addressing substance use and criminalization of communities. The term that seemed to encapsulate this notion best was Horseman's expression, *homefires*.

HANDS HELD IN COMMUNITY. Community held a pivotal role throughout the conversations, both as a means of ameliorating challenges related to substance use, but also as a corrective for other criminalized behaviours. Community itself was seen as a potential healer *of* the community members and as a maintainer of accountability and mutual aid. Community was articulated as a reciprocal, relational network of healing, engagement, empowerment, and enlightenment if it is cultivated properly.

Some noteworthy examples included Dell referring to the ways in which community can support families struggling with substance use, as illustrated by methods used in Cross Lake. He described "dry out" (sober living) homes placed in the middle of town. "...Not to shame [people struggling with substance use]," he stated. "[But] to say, 'we're here for you. We see that you're suffering.'" These relationships of interdependence were articulated throughout the interviews as networks of support; a space to be surrounded by the love and connection of your peers, to move through challenging experiences.

Further important articulations were presented in the way that community has a reciprocal healing and balancing effect when one engages with it in a good way. Speaking of rehabilitation of individuals who struggle with substance use, as well as individuals who have

been criminalized within the justice system, Josh stated, “I’ve seen the greatest change from just lateral kindness, lateral empathy and building on those skills... just nurturing people in general is rehabilitating.” He was referring specifically to “community walks” that he coordinates and engages in with other community members – patrolling areas to provide food and water, and a check in to those who need it. The foundational idea was that, by nurturing your community, you feel good, and your community nurtures you. The relationship is inherently reciprocal, and heals, empowers, and uplifts when cultivated in these ways.

Others spoke of the way community enriches and supports individuals when well-maintained. Levi called attention to the way that, by creating a sense of community (e.g., care and mutual aid amongst community membership) an agency that attends to a significant community of relatives that use substances in the downtown area saw a dramatic decrease in overdoses due to community members engaging in the care of one another. He, and others, also spoke of the way connections in community allow for the transmission of intergenerational knowledge – whether that’s traditional Indigenous Knowledges like how to harvest medicines, conduct a sweat lodge, speak traditional languages, or sing traditional songs, how to hunt, garden and so forth, or comparably, in rural communities how 4H used to have a strong presence in passing on knowledge of rural, agricultural communities. And, that the dissolution of these connections has led not only to a loss of the transmission of vital knowledge, but also to a loss of community accountability, shared care of common spaces, and shared care of one another.

Across the conversations, research participants common recognition was that, when community was cultivated, creating a sense of belonging, ownership, communication, common-purpose, and connection within a community, it became self-sustaining, reciprocally empowering, and protective of its membership.

RESTORING THE SACRED HEART. The need for restoring and reintegrating Indigenous cultural values and knowledges into systems of healing, rehabilitation, and community wellness was also universally recognized among research participants as a prerequisite for success and the greatest opportunity for positively impacting problematic substance use in the community. Damon stated, "some Indigenous communities in Canada have introduced on-the-land healing...outside of the urban environment... and they seem to work better." Speaking of his own experiences with land-based practices, Horseman stated, "this is where we recover from trauma. This is where we pick ourselves back up, where we plant our feet into the ground and we feel our roots." I would also add that there was no single "area of priority" for the integration of Indigenous Knowledges, but more so the need to be integrated in all areas of service. As Christin stated, "...healthcare, mental health, and wellness... definitely can be incorporated... with Indigenous culture and Indigenous Knowledge and ways of being... and would be beneficial." Dell echoed these sentiments, while advocating for Indigenous control, noting that "...services that specialize in working with [Indigenous Peoples] in a culturally sensitive, mental health sensitive way would be better... more efficient... and like would be having better outcomes."

Participants specifically identified Indigenous Peoples' need to be provided with culturally competent care by people who share their epistemological orientation to the cosmos, as well as a shared experience of their lived reality. Horseman spoke of his own challenges in accessing a counsellor with a traditional Indigenous orientation. "[There are] very, very few. ...a lot of... counsellors...think that they're going to academic their way through it... we don't connect with people like [that]... because... [they] don't align with our values, our core beliefs." Quinn, Josh, and Levi all spoke about integrations of Indigenous traditions into the justice system. This

included examples like Indigenous therapists with lived experiences, adequately funded and frequent land-based teachings and sweat lodges being open and accessible to all community members, healthcare and housing services that are foundationally designed around Indigenous Knowledges and implemented by Indigenous Peoples, and justice systems that create opportunities for Indigenous means of addressing holistic wellbeing between offenders, victims and their communities as well as their subsequent rehabilitation.

Comments by research participants surrounding the above-mentioned integrations varied in complexity and articulation, ranging from simple recommendations such as Josh's recommendation of creating trainers who can facilitate the integration of the Seven Sacred Teachings into workplaces and agencies, to more complex, well thought out program interventions to address homelessness (see Appendix 4 for Levi's Proposal for Managing Encampments), or community wellness (see Appendix 5 for Levi's story of the Indigenization of Manitoba's Covid Vaccine Program), for example.

To summarize, recognizing the profound negative impact of colonialism and its specific disintegration of Indigenous culture and ways of being, restoration of that cultural component and those ideas *by Indigenous People* (this cannot be stressed enough) is a vital component to addressing the underlying causes of problematic substance use and its subsequent challenges.

SUPPORT THROUGH THE SEASONS. In some North American Indigenous traditions, the four seasons are a representation of our own cycles of life: Spring is our birth and arrival into this world; Summer is our youth and transition into adulthood; Fall is when we tend to harvest much of our life's work and give back – our middle age; and Winter is when we return to the Earth, and our Spirit returns to the Spirit World.

Six research participants spoke of the need for a continuity of care across the lifespan, and across circumstances, noting that a lack of continuity of care as a significant antagonist of undue hardship, which often leads to precarity and substance use challenges.

Josh articulated an example of this phenomenon that has been broadly recognized in public discourse regarding youth exiting the child welfare system. He indicates that when aging out of care, the message received through the system is, "...wish you the best. ...we'll see you later... see you never." At which point, all services and supports are immediately discontinued and there is no follow up. He adds that, "...where our systems fail is just a lack of rapport and continuity of services." Other participants similarly suggested that healthcare, justice, housing, and addictions services would all greatly benefit from continuity of services and relationship-based follow up.

Acting from an Indigenous perspective that embraces holism and sees the "separate systems" as parts of a greater whole, that there is an enormous benefit to supporting individuals as they "transition" within and between different systems. As Christin points out, "...addictions, the Justice Department..., CFS, Jordan's Principle – all of these things... need to work together... because they are connected... not separate from each other. And, as a collective, when you work together, you know you are stronger."

FROM THE EAGLE'S PERCH. In consideration of the river metaphor that has woven through this story, I think of my own adventures paddling through Nopiming Provincial Park. Eagles tend to perch in the highest trees above the rivers and lakes, or circle above riding the air currents. Their perspective takes in all the conditions - they know the river, the changing weather, what lies ahead and what came before. This echoes numerous teachings that have been

shared with me from relatives in the community. For this reason, they are the symbol to reflect the guidance recommended by the research participants.

The guiding principles for this policy proposal can be summarized within the Seven Sacred Teachings of the Anishinaabe: truth, honesty, humility, respect, love, courage and wisdom. Three of the research participants referred to the Seven Sacred Teachings as a guiding framework for working in the world in ways that do least harm and promote the highest good. As Damon put it, "they're the essence of a good human being. And... it's a life struggle to live up to them." Some focussed more on one teaching than others, like when Quinn stated that in her work, "one of the things that I think works... most effectively... is... being unconditionally loving." In closing, this framework was a theme in a few of the conversations and seemed a fitting overarching moral framework for the policy proposal.

SUMMARY OF THE RIVER REVEALED

The rich narrative that emerged through the storytelling of the seven research participants elicited the vision of a waterway, whose themes were revealed as *the colonial undertow of white waters, where two rivers meet,* and *the great river ahead. The colonial undertow of white waters* situated colonialism as the foundation from which substance use and community criminalization emerges, and neo-colonialism as the process through which it is perpetuated. *Where two rivers meet* illustrated the complexity of maintaining one's identity and integrity while navigating two distinct worlds, but also the opportunity therein. Lastly, *the great river ahead* provided articulations for reconciliatory governmental practices, and the alternative policy framework – the *circle of care,* as a holistic response to substance use and community criminalization. This knowledge illustrated the deep understanding of the genesis of the issues discussed and provided holistic solutions. This knowledge was then re-storied to research participants for their feedback.

CHAPTER 7 – PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK AND PIPE-CARRIER CONSULTATION

This section outlines the process of returning the research findings to participants for validation and reflection, and synthesizes the feedback received through a talking circle, individual meetings, and email correspondence. Participant responses affirmed the accuracy of the summary document while highlighting persistent structural barriers to the integration of Indigenous-based solutions. Two overarching themes emerged from this feedback: the persistence of the original problem - the systematic marginalization of Indigenous Knowledge in the policy-making process, and the identification of potential paths forward for advancing the proposed framework. The section concludes with reflections from the closing ceremony and pipe-carrier consultation, which further situate the findings within spiritual, relational, and decolonial frameworks.

RETURNING TO THE SOURCE

Following the transcription, coding, analysis, and formulation of the alternative policy proposal and recommendations for future research, I brought the summary document (Appendix 6) back to the research participants for their feedback and input. As mentioned above three of the seven research participants were able to attend the talking circle. Three were met on a one-to-one basis to review the summary document. One of those provided email feedback, one provided on-the-spot feedback and one had indicated they would provide email feedback but were unable to be reached for further follow up. The final participant reviewed the document over email and provided an email summary of their feedback.

THEMES

There were two broad areas of feedback from the research participants noted from the talking circle, final meetings, and email correspondence. These three major themes to emerge were: 1.) echoes of the original problem; 2.) and paths forward.

THEME 1: ECHOES OF THE ORIGINAL PROBLEM

All participants stated that while this research is accurate, it has been proposed by many in the past. As Josh indicates, these are "words echoed by advocates time and time again," not as a critique of the work, but as a broader critique of the socio-political climate in which we exist. This raises the *Original Problem*: Indigenous-based solutions have existed for millennia yet remain largely unimplemented by governments. As Christin stated, "...it...looks really good... we all agree with [the summary document]... but...putting it... into action when it comes to government and the way they do things, that's the challenge..." Horseman questioned the lack of incorporation of Indigenous practices into community wellness, "Why are different levels [of] government ...not coming together to move this forward?" The totality of these concerns is what Dell described as the "elephant in the room."

THEME 2: PATHS FORWARD

With these considerations in mind, and the research participants' enduring skepticism for change among governmental bodies, recommendations included diverse avenues for the integration of the alternative policy proposal. Horseman suggested trying to seed the Circle of Care within grassroots organizations who might have greater mobility to implement the policy for designing new programming. He suggested presenting "...a Powerpoint of how to get from point A to point D, and what that could look like... what you've created in terms of the Medicine Wheel, that can go in any direction... in any way." Josh, perhaps sharing my optimism, suggested trying to provide this information to "policy makers, decision makers and

...government." Damon chose a broader, more metaphorical framing referencing the Mohawk wampum belts that depicted two parallel canoes, representing the nations of *Turtle Island* and *Canada*. He stated, "...some of us are in your canoe. Some of you are in [ours]. ...we're learning from each other... [learning] to live in two worlds."

The general messaging was that the summary document was accurate, but the challenge ahead is to try to find ways to reach people who can use the information to help others.

CLOSING CEREMONY AND PIPE-CARRIER CONSULTATION

Lilian Bonito had shared her thoughts on the document during an informal conversation as part of the closing pipe ceremony. She affirmed the river metaphor as a connection to the rivers that run through our city and that, "those waters are unwell." She talked about our relatives who have been "dragged from the river." She added that the responsibility of the rivers are a collective responsibility that requires medicine of all types. She suggested that this document can be a kind of medicine.

She also provided the feedback that *restoring the sacred heart* within the *Circle of Care* ought to be flexible to embrace the sacredness of *all traditions*. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities have sacred practices that can inform this policy framework to make it relevant for communities that have other practices that embrace the sacredness in life.

Lastly, we discussed the notions of *Indigenization* and *de-colonialism*. We discussed the ways in which this thesis and the policy recommended therein serves as a means of *Indigenizing* colonial systems, rather than de-colonizing.

OVERALL SUMMARY OF RESULTS - GATHERING RELATIONAL FINDINGS

This Results chapter examined the Safer Streets Safer Lives Action Plan (SSSLAP) through an analysis of government and media texts and explored conversations and stories with

Indigenous community leaders. Together, these sources illuminate how substance use and public safety are framed in provincial policy, and how those framings diverge from Indigenous perspectives.

The SSSLAP analysis showed how the policy is underpinned by emotive rhetoric and justificatory claims that emphasize enforcement-oriented responses. While supportive language and references to treatment and education appear throughout the materials, enforcement received the greatest clarity, emphasis, and proportion of funding. Justifications for the plan frequently relied on claims of consultation, particularly with policing bodies and advisory reports, which reinforced existing carceral approaches with some mention of rehabilitative methods.

Indigenous research participants offered a contrasting position that situated substance use and community criminalization within the ongoing impacts of colonialism and neo-colonial systems. Through a relational, narrative framework, participants described how historical and ongoing marginalization and systemic injustice shape present harms. Participants articulated pathways forward grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing, being, seeing, and doing, and emphasized governmental accountability, genuine consultation, and Indigenous autonomy as foundational conditions for improvement. The Circle of Care emerged as a holistic, Indigenous-based framework centred on family, community, cultural restoration, and continuity of care across the lifespan to address substance use challenges and community criminalization.

This research was further grounded through guidance offered by Lilian Bonito during the closing pipe ceremony, where she affirmed the river metaphor as reflective of our shared urban "unwell" waterways - and reminded me that their healing is a collective responsibility requiring many forms of medicine. Her reflections reinforced the Circle of Care as a flexible, relational framework capable of honouring Indigenous and non-Indigenous sacred practices and positioned

this document itself as a potential form of medicine within ongoing efforts to Indigenize, though critically not de-colonize, colonial systems.

Collectively, the revealed findings highlight a disconnect between state-led policy approaches and Indigenous understandings of wellness and safety, underscoring the need for policy responses that move beyond enforcement toward relational, culturally grounded models of care. The Circle of Care emerged as a representation of this type of relational Indigenous-informed model of care.

CHAPTER 8 – DISCUSSION OF STORIES

The research participants articulated their understanding of substance use and its subsequent challenges in local communities, and from Indigenous ways of understanding, how those challenges could be addressed. Three main themes emerged from the conversations. *The colonial undertow of white water* illustrated the deep knowledge of the role colonialism has played in creating the conditions for substance use challenges, both historically, and in modern, neo-colonial manifestations. *Where the rivers meet* identified the epistemological and lived tension in the meeting of Indigenous and Western perspectives and strategies, while also revealing the emergent possibilities in that confluence. *The great river ahead* explored the conditions for reconciliatory policy creation and government action, including the *Circle of Care*. *The Circle of Care* is the Indigenous Knowledge-based policy alternative, comprised of four interconnected areas of intervention: homefires (familial / extended family wellbeing and internal resources), hands held in community (enhancement of the networks of reciprocal care and accountability in communities), restoring the sacred heart (re-integration and restoration of traditional Indigenous cultural values), and support through the seasons (continuity of care across the lifespan), as well as guiding principles – *from the eagle's perch*. Lastly, the discussion section discussed *echoes of the original problem* as articulated by research participants, and potential *paths forward*.

In this chapter, I review these revelations and compare them to the literature, while tying them into the theoretical framework of TribalCrit, and integrating proposals from the SSSLAP and the themes that emerged from the SSSLAP analysis.

THEME #1: THE COLONIAL UNDERTOW OF WHITE WATERS

The notion of colonialism as a mechanism for the establishment and maintenance of power operating on behalf of hegemonic interests is at this point common knowledge of Canadian history. Colonialism's impact on substance use is also well documented in the literature (see scoping reviews completed by Spillane, et al., 2023; Wilk, et al., 2017), supporting the research participants' claim.

The trajectory upon which colonialism, in the form of prioritization of white hegemonic interests, emerges throughout Canadian society exists in various manifestations. As Bennett and Blackstock articulate, "colonization is not just a legacy of the past, it manifests itself everyday in the way that we live surrounded by euro-western legal, social, spiritual and economic frameworks that... marginalize and, encroach on First Nations Peoples" (2002, p. 4). In the focus of this thesis topic, one can sense the perpetuation of colonization through the SSSLAP's prioritization of the "enforcement" pillar of the plan, especially upon reflection of the experiences outlined by the research participants.

In addition to this emergence, the *sentiment* identified as *hostility* bears relevant consideration. Indeed, in social discourse, individuals who use substances are collectively defined by the subjective rhetoric that identifies them, which implies the remedies that are appropriate (Herzog, 2016). In this case, *drug dealers* who *victimize communities* requires a response rooted in state violence, retribution, dominance, and Western notions of justice (Cuneen & Tauri, 2019). The result is the prioritization of enforcement-based policy initiatives.

Furthermore, the consistent articulation of *consultation* into the Progressive Conservatives' party messaging can be recognized as a deliberate rhetorical signifier of legitimacy. As Capano et al explore in their (2023) essay on legitimacy of knowledge in policy formation, knowledge as a constitutive component of policy formation is inherently problematic

in that knowledge provided *originates* from a field of expertise whose premises and conclusions will be informed by their biases. Therefore, consultation with the Police Commission, for example, will provide a perspective intrinsically rooted in a law enforcement perspective, prioritizing the utility of *tools* of the judicial system.

Furthermore, relying on linear Western perspectives provides reductive, symptom-based approaches (e.g., increased policing to address rising crime, substance education to address youth who are engaging in substance use, etc.) built upon what Bateson refers to as an "epistemological error" (Bateson, 1972, p. 483 as cited in Broadhead & Howard, 2021). In failing to see interrelated parts as fundamentally connected, an "ecology of bad ideas" emerges that fails to provide effective solutions to complex problems and often exacerbates them.

With specific respect to *enforcement,* as cited earlier in this document, Indigenous over-representation in the Canadian penal system (relative to non-Indigenous populations) is well established, but with particularly egregious representation in the prairies (Government of Canada, 2019; Malakieh, 2018). The priorities outlined under the enforcement pillar seek to enhance the mechanisms of social control (Cuneen & Tauri, 2019; Czyzewski, 2011), maintenance of white hegemony (Brayboy, 2009), and the exacerbation of impoverishment and family instability through community disruption in the carceral process (Jensen, et al., 2004), over-surveillance and mass incarceration (Reece, 2020), and the extraction of resources from those communities (e.g., enhanced ease of civil forfeiture practices – Holcomb, et al., 2018).

From a TribalCrit analytical perspective, this enhancement not only intentionally entrenches hardship disproportionately experienced by Indigenous Peoples but prioritizes the "safety and protection" of the white property-owning class (as articulated by the research participants, and then-Premier Pallister) while targeting Indigenous Populations through hostile,

coded language, such as targeting “drug dealers” or “gangs” (Chartier, 2019, p. 5; Gordon, 2019, p. 32; Grabish, 2019). This reproduction of the subjugation of Indigenous Peoples within legislation, community policing, control, coercion, and assimilation (Czyzewski, 2011) is further explored by Marques and Monchalin, who maintain, “*That* Indigenous...bodies are part of the terrain of conflict must not only be considered a bi-product... of colonialist praxis, but rather a deliberate strategy of it” (2020, p. 80, emphasis added for clarity). Indeed, these judicial assaults on the community are what Mbembé (2003) referred to as *necropolitics*, wherein systems of death, whether in a literal sense, including murder, pain and suffering, or a figurative social death like incarceration – are used as a means of perpetual threat upon a people in order to control and subjugate them (as cited in Marques & Monchalin, 2020).

Furthermore, the antagonism experienced disproportionately by Indigenous Peoples at the hands of law enforcement officials is not only systemically visible (as outlined in the literature review, and also Lewis, 1989, 1992; McLeod, 1996, as cited in Samuels-Wortley, 2021), but experientially real as exhibited by sentiments throughout the interviews. Horseman illustrated this sentiment when stating to his son, “these [police officers] are not your friends... you do not trust them.” Horseman’s sentiments are not a statistical outlier, but a pattern experienced within racialized and Indigenous communities, as supported in academia (Black Experience Project, 2014; Cao, 2014; Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2016, as cited in Samuels-Wortley, 2021).

When one considers the evidence that shows a deliberate pattern of ongoing genocide of Indigenous Peoples (“deliberately inflicting on a group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part” (United Nations, n.d., “Definition” section), and a *doubling-down* on policies that prioritize law enforcement, one cannot ignore the implications that the systems that govern Canadian society maintain an orientation towards the

active elimination and assimilation of Indigenous Peoples and the violent entrenchment of white supremacy through colonial, judicial, and legislative means.

SUBTHEME 1C – DELIBERATE LACK OF GOVERNMENTAL / SYSTEMIC ACCOUNTABILITY AND FLEXIBILITY

This sub-theme had been mentioned by participants both in the initial interviews, and prominently in the subsequent follow up reflections to an extent that justifies its own explication. Specifically, participants highlighted a lack government accountability, which, upon reflection is among the most corrosive and pernicious tools at the disposal of the hegemon. Lack of government accountability had two functional means of operation: tokenism, and a lack of follow through on commitments. Firstly, to fully understand tokenism, it is important to define and situate it in relation to neo-colonialism.

Neo-colonialism is a strategy that maintains colonial control over colonized places, and is a deliberate shift in strategy away from direct confrontation, tending towards more covert means of oppression and assimilation. This approach has been taken as a means of quelling colonial resistance from Indigenous Peoples, especially since the Second World War (Waterfall, 2006). These appeasement strategies involve, among other tactics, a tendency to incorporate Indigenous Peoples within the lower-level positions of colonial structures, while maintaining power and decision-making authority in the hands of dominant power holders (Waterfall, 2006). In this way, as Coulthard and Alfred put it, “the structure of domination is modified, but the position of the colonized remains unchanged...” (2014, p. 39).

Secondly, to understand tokenism we look to Kanter (1977), who provided one of the clearest foundational articulations of the term, where she identified that minority groups experience “‘perceptual tendencies’ [of] assimilation, visibility, and contrast” (as cited in

Stichman et al., 2010, p. 633). "Assimilation" requires the limitation and minimization of the marginalized individual's persona into a role performance that is compatible within the dominant group, and includes aspects of non-confrontational representation, limited upward mobility, and personal distortion. In a modern Indigenous context this might look like wearing Indigenous beaded earrings but not talking about the harms of colonialism or discussing the need to overhaul our socio-political systems. The second perceptual tendency Kanter outlines is "visibility," which is the experience through which the marginalized individual must work harder than their peers in response to disproportionate scrutiny that comes upon them due to their perceived difference. Lastly, "contrast" involves the enhanced differentiation between the tokenized party and the dominant group, which leads to isolation and polarization between the two groups (p. 634). The combined social contortion severely inhibits the capacity of the performative actor.

Simultaneously, research participants articulated the ways in which "Indigenous consultation," "Indigenous-led" (without quantification or definition) or, what some referred to as "window-dressing," which is to say, incorporation of Indigenous practices in a way which are not overly disruptive to the status quo, leads to a watering down of legitimate Indigeneity, while providing a façade of legitimate Indigenous representation.

Together, these modes of co-opting Indigeneity enable the perpetuation of white supremacy in the following ways. Firstly, they legitimize colonial systems, even under a critical gaze – because even those who are enlisted to consult, represent, or *Indigenize* those services are likely engaging in good faith with the aim of *changing the system from within.* And, their conviction without power is what makes the arrangement so potent for providing legitimacy without risking disruption to the status quo. By incorporating Indigenous practices, titles, or representations into colonial structures without redistributing power hegemonic systems appear

responsive to community concerns while remaining fundamentally unchanged, thereby appeasing colonial resistance (Butterfly, 2006).

Consistent with Kanter's framework of tokenism, those enlisted for their Indigeneity may internalize pressures to perform within normative bounds, securing small incremental changes while advancing the colonial enterprise, largely uninterrupted. While reforms do occur, their cumulative effect is often outweighed by the broader legitimization of colonial systems, which undermines substantive anti-colonial resistance. Examples of this dynamic can be seen in child welfare and policing, where authority is nominally transferred to First Nations communities that remain tasked with enforcing colonial rules under the guise of Indigenous governance. As Levi described, this tendency serves to "paint the system brown and call it a day."

Waterfall (2006) documented this process in her experiences as an Indigenous child welfare worker within an "Indigenous" agency, noting the pressures to conform to colonial standards of legitimacy and funding, and the ways such roles can lead to the internalization of Eurocentric, deficit-based approaches to care. A feedback loop thus emerges, wherein colonial assimilation operates on two fronts simultaneously: through the internalization of colonial values by Indigenous workers, and through the enforcement of colonial policies upon Indigenous communities by Indigenous community members themselves.

This form of tokenized neo-colonialism provides cover for colonial power to be maintained by mobilizing Indigenous participation in the administration of colonial systems. It offers a false sense of decision-making authority, autonomy, and self-governance in title - and in some cases procedure - without grounding in Indigenous epistemologies, sovereignty, or substantive power (Brayboy, 2009), thereby undermining the legitimacy of reconciliation efforts.

The second area of governmental unaccountability that was noteworthy for participants was an overall lack of substantive follow through, preferring actions based in symbolic gestures. As Dell outlined, there are numerous inquiries and procedures that outline the necessity for change, and the means to do so but these reports and recommendations have no mechanisms for accountability. Thus, governments can appear to be wading into the waters of reconciliation, by engaging in the *truth* component (e.g., Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), etc.), but they lack follow through on *reconciliatory* commitments based on the outcomes of the research. Fee writes in 2012, that as personal accounts emerged as part of the TRC and Stephen Harper's public apology received positive press for the sense of accountability the apology *symbolized*, settlements issued to residential school survivors were impeded due to administrative backlog and funding shortages. This speaks to Beck's (2016) notion of *consultation fatigue,* which emerged from qualitative research concerning inter-boundary Indigenous water rights between Northwest Territories and Alberta. Consultation fatigue is the demoralization and exhaustion experienced by communities whose concerns are not addressed, despite consultation. This process wears down communities who tire of providing their time, effort, and vulnerability for little or no positive outcome. Obstructing the trajectory of justice and funneling it through long bureaucratic corridors, without delivering results has a cooling effect, which saps the lifeblood from anti-colonial movements.

These aspects of reconciliation can be further understood through the insights provided by Catherine Lu (2017), who discussed the differences between structural injustice and interactional injustice. Structural injustices being the economic, educational, political and power structures that generate and perpetuate harms to groups of people. Interactional injustices can be thought of as the ways in which we relate to one another in regulation and discourse (Lu, 2017,

as cited in Eisenberg, 2018). As a society, we have progressed with respect to interactional justice, however structurally we have a very long way to go, as evidenced throughout this thesis.

A final example that ties into lack of follow through as it relates to two-faced performance by government was provided by Schricker (2023), who calls attention to the way the Government of Canada has endorsed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples [UNDRIP], which ensures "free, prior, and informed consent" on the development of Indigenous lands (United Nations, 2007, art. 32.2, as cited in Schricker, 2023). However, the recent the enactment of Bill C-5 prioritizes projects of "national interest" above the rights of, and duties to consult with Indigenous Peoples (Ecojustice, 2025), illustrating a purely symbolic gesture.

In summary of the first theme, we can see the way in which the *enforcement* pillar of the SSSLAP represents a perpetuation of colonial aims towards control, coercion and assimilation of Indigenous Peoples, shrouded in the false legitimacy of consultation, and motivated by hostile sentimentality. Furthermore, it is evident that neo-colonial tokenism is a Trojan Horse for the perpetuation of white supremacy by enlisting Indigenous bodies to carry out colonial policies. The only logical way out of neo-colonial tokenism is for Indigenous Peoples to have "a legitimate seat at the table where their voices are equal to those who sit beside them" (Blackwell & Ballangarry, 2021, p. 3, as cited by Schricker, 2023). By providing power equity Indigenous Peoples would have the authority to introduce changed informed by their worldviews, and in greater service of Indigenous communities (Althaus & O'Faircheallaigh, 2022), as was proposed by several research participants.

THEME 2: WHERE TWO RIVERS MEET

This theme articulated an overarching anxiety experienced by research participants existing in two worlds (Indigenous and white-settler societies), and the struggle to maintain one's Indigeneity within the hegemonic paradigm. Alongside this tension was an underlying optimism that knowledge derived from Indigenous perspectives can help individuals struggling with substance use and reduce the criminalization of communities.

This tension and optimism spoke to me of the necessity of incorporating a "Two-Eyed Seeing approach" to this project (Bartlett, et al. 2012; Wright, et al. 2019), which can recognize the strengths that can be found in incorporating components of both worldviews in a spirit of humility. However, this approach is not without potential pitfalls in its application.

Critiques have surfaced around Two-Eyed Seeing, namely that for someone like myself whose upbringing, education, and understanding of the world are rooted within a Western society – my "Western Eye" has far greater influence and informs more of my observations and conclusions (Broadhead & Howard, 2021). In much the same way my critiques above targeted knowledge generation within policy formation, I must be cognizant of my own limitations and biases. Furthermore, the setting into which this research falls – within Western academic purview, for the purposes of policy formation – situates the diverse Indigenous Knowledges presented at an implicit disadvantage as the epistemologies of academia are largely rooted in very different understandings of reality. By incorporating opportunities for feedback and verification of ideas with research participants and a pipe carrier, and with the input of an Indigenous academic on my thesis committee, I had hoped to mitigate the biases and provide space to challenge hegemonic structures (including my own), while working towards strengthening in my own "Indigenous Eye."

Tensions articulated between Western and Indigenous worldviews was explored by several research participants who described the challenge of navigating being a part of two very distinct worlds (Indigenous and Western). Indeed, this deep-rooted incongruence rests like a ley line beneath the metaphorical river this thesis has explored; an energetic rift whose influence is felt time and again. However, as Warner suggests in her essay as an Indigenous educator living in two worlds, navigating these tension is worthwhile for the benefit of our collective communities (2021).

However, this tension remains and has been felt even by myself within this research project – the parameters through which research *must* occur within academia, meeting with the more intuitive, relational interactions with research participants has been, at times, off-putting. For example, trying to establish genuine connection and rapport on first introductions with research participants, then having to go "on-script" for ethics satisfaction. I understand the merit of the latter, but it illustrates an imposition that exists that can come at the expense of relationship building, even within liberal academia. It is a simple illustration of diverse worldviews meeting and interacting – but, ultimately, as with research participants' intoned observation – Western worldviews receive a privileged position within the hierarchy. However, as Smith (1999) observes, the relational space through which Indigenous research occurs and the process through which they inform and reform academic frameworks of understanding serves an important function of altering the landscape of discursive interaction (as cited in Styres, et al., 2010). I hope that this project can in small part impact that broader landscape for the benefit of all our relations.

It is within this context that the present policy proposal is advanced, grounded in Indigenous storytelling as a foundational source of knowledge (Brayboy, 2009). As a non-neutral

academic engaging in research with Indigenous Peoples, there exists a moral and academic obligation to challenge the power structures that reproduce subjugation and harmful outcomes. In reflection of this experiential schism articulated by research participants, the confidence they expressed in Indigenous Knowledge as a means of addressing these challenges, and my own Two-Eyed Seeing perspective, supported by research participants, and other Indigenous contributors, this research is approached with cautious optimism. It reminds us of the potential of incorporating Indigenous Knowledges into policy formation as a means of responding more effectively to substance use and the ongoing criminalization of communities. It also reminds me of Lilian Bonito's reflection that the emergent vision of a river is well-suited to this narrative exploration – our rivers are sick, and they need medicine – and we all have a role to play in that healing.

Additionally, within the SSSLAP subtheme of *support* - as expressed through the sentiments used to promote rehabilitative and educational aspects of the policy - there remains a plausible possibility that some policymakers genuinely seek to assist individuals experiencing substance use challenges, as well as communities that have been criminalized through broader systemic, political, and historical forces. If there remains a possibility that governments have thus far struggled to meaningfully incorporate holistic approaches due, in part, to what Button (2011) describes as a "blindness to our moral blind spots," wherein judgments and actions are shaped by unrecognized limitations in understanding (p. 717), then this position may also hold a measure of cautious optimism as well. If such sentiments of support can be redirected toward genuinely remedial, relational, and accountable approaches, the possibility for meaningful change remains.

SUBTHEME 2B: WHERE RIVERS MEET, LIES OPPORTUNITY

The undercurrent narrative throughout the interviews was one of cautious optimism. Myhal and Carroll (2023) distinguish between optimism as a disposition and optimism as a survival-oriented response to profound structural harm, life-or-death consequences, and existential threat. This form of optimism was evident in the ways participants identified meaningful opportunities for change in response to the profound community-based challenges discussed.

This optimism stretches beyond an existential necessity, however. When Bateson (1972) referred to the "ecology of bad ideas" that emerges from reductive, linear, Western perspectives, an alternative proposition emerges, which is that holistic perspectives have a great deal to offer. When considering the complexity of challenges around substance use and criminalization of communities, there exist a diversity of propagating factors: poverty, unattended trauma, community disconnection, cultural dislocation, violence, racism, sexism, exploitation, people being unhoused among many others. Consultation that can hold space for issues as complex as these, *necessitates* holistic frameworks of understanding. Herein lies the opportunity of this thesis.

THEME 3: THE GREAT RIVER AHEAD

This theme held the vision for a future of possibility, rooted in respect, accountability, and collaboration. It included the subtheme *maps and guideposts* - recommendations for governments to adhere to for a mutually beneficial (Indigenous / non-Indigenous) future to emerge. These recommendations included accountability, self-governance, and legitimate consultation. The second subtheme was the policy related recommendation - the *Circle of Care*, comprised of *homefires, hands held in community, restoring the sacred heart,* and *support across the seasons*.

SUBTHEME 3A – MAPS AND GUIDEPOSTS

With respect to accountability, governance, and legitimate consultation, five research participants suggested some form of mandated representation within government or bureaucracy, provided such roles include the authority necessary to enact change. The literature reflects both the possibilities of deliberative representation and the persistent barriers to Indigenous autonomy within bureaucratic systems (Althaus & O'Faircheallaigh, 2022; Bryer & Sahin, 2012; Murphy, 2008). A tension therefore remains between the promise of meaningful Indigenous engagement and the risk of placation without the capacity to deliver. This tension reaffirms Brayboy's (2009) assertion, and the research participants' observation that Indigenous participation within dominant systems is inherently political, participation implies tacit endorsement, yet assertion of identity and rights can only exist as a form of political resistance. The complexity of such spaces warrants its own exploration, but the detailed development of models for Indigenous self-governance, autonomy, and power-sharing exceeds the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, it remains an important area for future research and stands as a central recommendation emerging from the interviews.

SUBTHEME 3B: THE CIRCLE OF CARE

As mentioned above, this subtheme represents the alternative Indigenous-based policy proposal to address substance use and criminalization of communities.

In numerous First Nations (Ininew, Anishinaabe) teachings that have been shared with me over the years, a very common theme for understanding phenomena in the world is a four-quadrant circle that makes up a holistic representation of something else. Common examples include the four-seasons making up one year; four stages of the human life; and the Medicine Wheel model of the self - that is, our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual selves comprising

a holistic model of a human being whose parts are interrelated and inseparable. Thus, the four-quadrant model seemed a fitting counterpoint to the "three pillars" (reminiscent of the euro-centric heritage) of the SSSLAP. Four-quadrants reminds us of the interconnection of all things, and the relational nature of the cosmos (Kovach, 2018).

In this section the four-quadrants of the Circle of Care include *homefires*, *hands held in community*, *restoring the sacred heart*, and *support through the seasons*. As with other similar representations, each of these quadrants are interconnected and interwoven. The enhancement of one area supports the others, and where there are deficits in one, they impact the others. Together, they represent a holistic system of relational care. It is also worth noting that many of the recommendations echo the sentiments found in the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (2016), Health Canada's (2011) research collaboration with AFN, NNAPF, and FNHIB, and Rowan's (2014) scoping review of practical Indigenous based modes of healing and wellness.

HOMEFIRES. As articulated above, the notion of tending the homefires of the community referred to all aspects of one's home-based relational network. This includes but is not limited to one's physical home and family – parents, children, siblings, and extended family - and the relational health of those relationships, the values, and the culture enacted within the home. It also relates to the stability and availability of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual resources within the home. The homefire is also more than these things – a well-tended

homefire is a space of warmth and welcome, safety and security, belonging and actualization, connection and meaning.

Research shows that positive, responsive, attentive parenting (Vanderbilt-Adriance et al., 2015), as well as social supports, parental / marital wellbeing, and reduced physical punishment of children (Walker et al., 2011) can reduce problematic and conduct behaviours, enhance social-emotional development and childhood cognition, which often translate into greater resilience and adaptive functioning in adulthood. These types of interventions are particularly relevant in Indigenous communities where, due to the separation of traditional family units (e.g., through

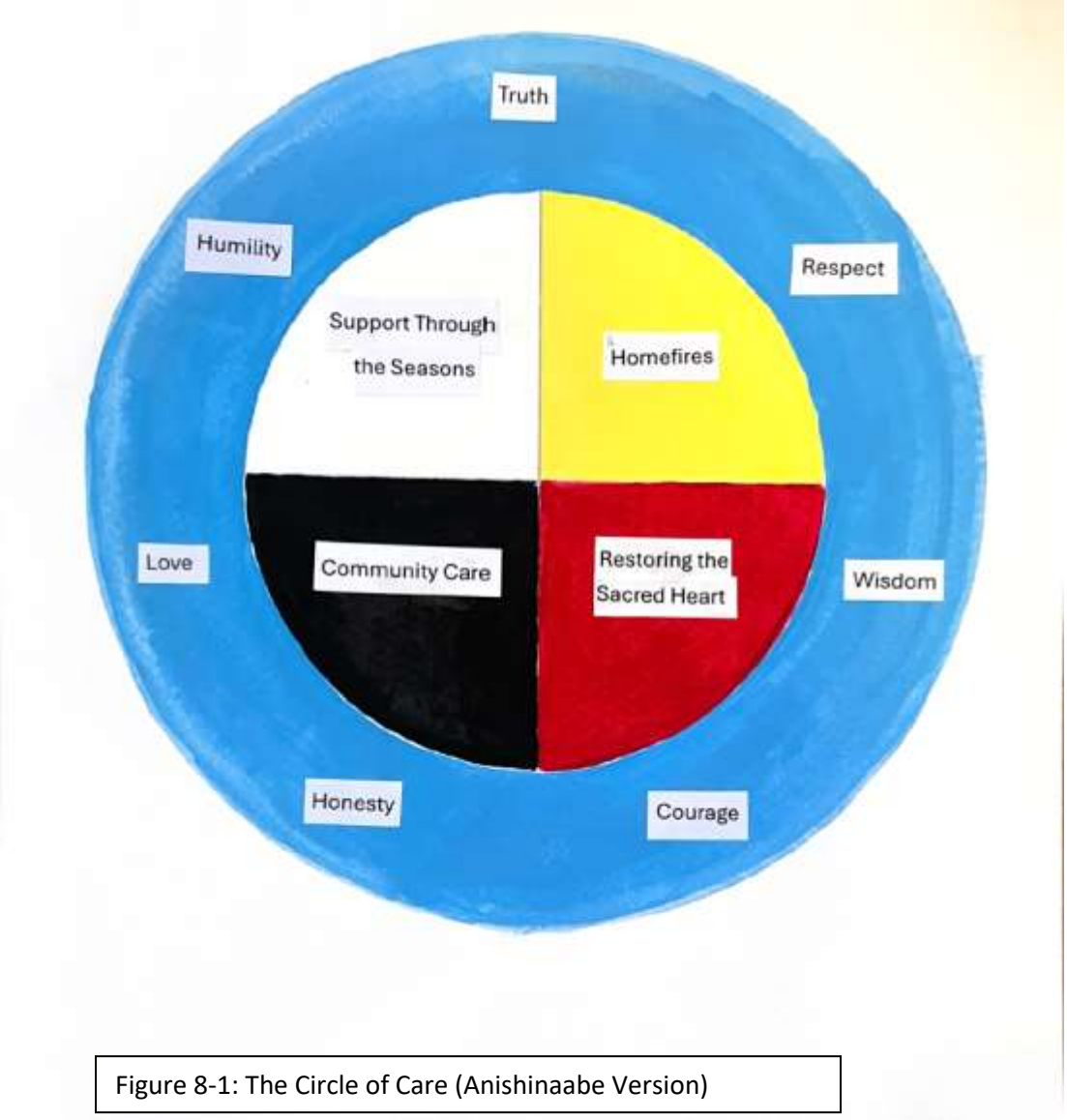

Figure 8-1: The Circle of Care (Anishinaabe Version)

Indian Residential Schools, or the modern child welfare system), disproportionate exposure to stress and adverse childhood experiences, and disproportionate rates of poverty (Canada Without Poverty, n.d., as cited in Carrier-Smith & On, 2023), parents are often disadvantaged because the structural conditions for parental success have been undermined on multiple fronts. These ongoing impacts are felt multi-generationally and require concerted interventions through a variety of approaches.

Poverty, excessive stress, lack of parental engagement, and exposure to violence all have negative neurodevelopmental and mental health impacts on children which carry onto adulthood and may be irreversible (Conroy et al., 2010; Dowd et al. 2009, as cited in Walker, et al., 2011; McKane & Richard, 2020). These material deprivations also reduce opportunities and increase the tendency to remain impoverished into adulthood (Wagmiller & Adelman, 2009). These circumstances are associated with increased aggression, insecure attachments, anti-social tendencies, and high-risk behaviours in youth, which carry forward into adulthood (Walker, et al., 2011) and have a potential to express intergenerationally (Wagmiller & Adelman, 2009).

If we look farther down the developmental timeline, the institutionalization of children (whether through youth corrections or via child welfare placements into non-parental residential care) has been shown to lead to a myriad of adverse effects, such as ill health, attachment disorders, impaired intellectual capacity, attention disorders and anxiety (Rutter, et al., 2010; van IJzendoorn, 2008, both as cited in Walker, et al., 2011). Indigenous representation within the youth justice system has increased over time, while overall admissions have been reduced (Wiley, et al., 2020). However, despite a press for more preventative measures to apprehensions (First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, 2019, as cited in Caldwell & Sinha, 2020), child

welfare placements remain high in the province and Indigenous representation outnumbers non-Indigenous counterparts by a ratio of nine-to-one (Hoye, 2025).

In summary, poverty is an intergenerational antagonist that negatively affects both parents and children in a perpetuating cycle of stress, impaired self-actualization and wellbeing. These burdens are disproportionately experienced by Indigenous Peoples whose outcomes ripple out into their communities, causing a chain reaction of overburdened systems (educational, judicial, relational, etc.), and are a precipitating factor for increasing disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Together, these dynamics illustrate how home-based relational, material, and structural conditions can shape long-term wellbeing.

Positive impacts can be made in these areas through family enhancement practices that facilitate positive relationships, healthy attachments, and social support networks throughout the family system, maintaining family connections, and reducing poverty. These approaches would have broad positive impacts across communities.

HANDS HELD IN COMMUNITY. Community was spoken of as a reciprocal network of knowledge, support, connection and accountability. Once established and nourished, community becomes a protective factor for each of its community members; a transmitter and medium through which knowledge is transferred; and a space where individuals both hold and are held accountable.

Community wellness has long been understood to play a significant role in human flourishing, with early articulations in the literature occurring at a time when the prevalence of mental health conditions was noted to be on the rise (Dunn, 1959). Myers and Sweeney articulated that functional therapeutic models of the self could not be well-conceived without presenting the self in relation to the community within which it exists (2004). As Roy et al.

(2018) point out "achieving optimal health is reliant on living in a community that supports health" (p. 1801). For example, the literature suggests that community factors, such as safety and social cohesion, have been shown to affect conduct disorders and academic success among youth. In instances where neighbourhoods are unsafe and fractured, outcomes tend to be less favourable (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000, as cited in Vanderbilt-Adriance, 2015), and in instances of greater safety and social cohesion, children's outcomes and behaviours have improved (Jaffee, et al., 2007, as cited in Vanderbilt-Adriance, 2015). Similarly, community disorganization, vacancy, and lack of community supports were recognized risk factors for substance use, specifically among youth demographics (Hays et al., 2003). Furthermore, community support has been shown to reduce mental health challenges amongst abuse survivors using regression models of statistical analysis drawn from national surveys out of the United States (Greenfield & Marks, 2010).

These academic sources support what has often been shared with me about the nature of health and wellness from an Indigenous perspective - that *wellness is relational*. As Josh mentioned in his interview, the notion of "independence" is largely an illusion, imposed upon modern society to erode the true nature of individual health and wellness being intimately intertwined within the health and wellbeing of the collective. Furthermore, the literature supports the research participants' assertion that community is a source of resilience, strength, and support (Corballis & Hari, 2018; Gill, 2016). Not only that, but that the nature of the community-self relationship is a reciprocal co-creation of self and environment. As Cloutier et al. (2019) suggest, aesthetics, greenspace integration, and maintenance are *internalized* in individual and community wellbeing. In this way the authors articulate what we intuitively sense, and what was brought forward through the research participants: community, at its core, is

a network of reciprocity; where it thrives, we will thrive, and where it suffers, we too will suffer. As Cajete (2016) states, "our physical and biological survival are intimately interwoven with the communities that we create *and that create us*" (p. 366, emphasis added). As Dell indicated there is an interrelationship between what is in the universe and what is in us, and Indigenous Peoples understood (and continue to understand, in many circles) the existential and moral necessity of tending these relationships.

Lastly, this theme reminded me of Dell's praised the Bruce Oake Recovery Centre, when he emphasized that what worked for them was cultivation of community, both within the centre and during transition out of care. This centre, to the credit of the SSSLAP, was a funding priority to which they were a major contributor (Manitoba Government, 2020).

RESTORING THE SACRED HEART. The research participants all emphasized the necessity for Indigenous cultural restoration as a central tenet in healing the wounds that drive problematic substance use and the criminalization of communities. They spoke of the way individuals who are rooted in traditional orientations to self, community and the cosmos are proud, engaged, participating members of the community. It was a reminder of the quote from Elder Jim Dumont (as cited in CIHR, 2016), "...the answer to addressing substance use issues exists within Indigenous culture" (p. 10).

Participants articulated cultural restoration as enhanced access to land-based activities – sweat lodges, sundances, medicine picking, story-telling, sacred fires, fasting, etc., and the creation of accessible, safe, ceremonial spaces for people to attend regular community gatherings of spiritual and cultural significance.

The effects of providing access to cultural activities for Indigenous Peoples has been widely studied and shown to positively impact health and wellbeing across the lifespan (Bourke,

et al., 2018; Colquhoun & Dockery, 2012; Dudgeon, et al., 2020; Healing Foundation, 2019; McIvor, et al., 2013), including healing from intergenerational trauma, and reducing substance use amongst participants (CIHR, 2016; Marsh, et al., 2016, Marsh, et al., 2018; Rowan, et al., 2014). Relating to the cultural interventions upon criminalized communities, Shepherd et al.'s (2018) research into recidivism for violent offences found that while cultural identity did not have an impact on recidivism (i.e., identifying to a cultural group), cultural engagement (participating in community cultural activities) did. This was supported by Gutierrez, et al.'s (2018) meta-analysis of culturally relevant programming effectively lowering recidivism rates amongst Indigenous offenders who engaged in cultural programming while in custody. These findings resonate with my own experiences of working with justice-involved Indigenous individuals who subsequently engaged in traditional cultural programming.

The impacts of cultural re-integration illustrate the profound and diverse benefits cultural programming can offer to Indigenous populations, and beyond. They have the capacity to restore balance, enhance quality of life, empower, and connect individuals to their cultural roots in ways that other interventions often cannot replicate.

SUPPORT THROUGH THE SEASONS. As outlined above, many research participants identified discontinuity of support across systems (justice, healthcare, child welfare, addictions treatment, etc.) as precipitating hardship, problematic substance use, and criminalization.

When these transitions are not tended to, for example exiting the child welfare system and the outcomes that problematic transition creates, especially considered alongside Josh's scathing, "see you later, see you never" method of parting ways when aging out of care, it understandably follows that 50% of Winnipeg's homeless population had prior involvement in the child welfare system (End Homelessness Winnipeg, 2025). This abrupt disconnection Josh

described above results in a broad array of negative outcomes, including higher rates of substance use (Barker, et al., 2020), low academic achievement and employment outcomes, higher incidences of homelessness, criminal justice involvement, youth pregnancy, poorer health outcomes and isolation (Kovarikova, 2017). Furthermore, as Barker et al. noted in their (2020) research on youth who transitioned out of care in Vancouver, individuals who had access to more transitional services were 71% less likely to be homeless, and 65% less likely to experience problematic substance use issues.

In this respect, youth transitioning out of care do not necessarily require complex systems or bureaucracies to be erected to support those needs. Reporting on the needs of youth aging out of care, the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children in Youth (2014) identified that many youth report the need for at least *one* supportive adult to assist in that transition to adulthood (p. 56 as cited in Hutton, et al., 2019).

Another example would be the justice system and the levels of recidivism in Manitoba. Research from Taxman (2007), suggested probation and parole officers engaging in prosocial skills development, while addressing criminogenic traits throughout their contact led to a reduction in recidivism rates by over 30% when compared to control groups. Similarly, criminalized individuals who had attended substance use treatment programs were much less likely to relapse or return to custody if they were provided aftercare post-treatment (Brown et al., 2001; Brown et al., 2009), which supports the feedback of youth that exited addictions treatment programs who requested aftercare support (Russel & Gillis, 2022). The benefits of aftercare are embraced in the literature but may be most effective for out-patient and post-incarceration treatment programs (Vanderplasschen, et al., 2010).

From a healthcare perspective, Cabana and Jee's systematic review from 2004 suggested that sustained continuity of care reduced hospitalization and ER visits, increased access to preventative medicine and increased patient satisfaction, especially with older adults (Li et al., 2022) – while adding there were no noted negative effects of sustained continuity of care (Cabana & Jee, 2004).

Thus, we see a host of benefits across systems, if we can maintain a caring connection between and throughout these systems. Additionally, as we come to the final quadrant of the Circle of Care, it remains relevant to consider how the quadrants are interconnected. From a logistical point of view, maintaining connection and support across systems and lifespans may seem an insurmountable task, but perhaps these systems become more organic and self-reinforcing if they are situated within a well-cultivated community, rooted in healthy homefires, supported by a sacred foundation.

FROM THE EAGLE'S PERCH. I have been told by many in the Indigenous communities of Winnipeg that the teaching of the eagle (in the Seven Sacred Teachings), is that of love. From a perspective high above our terrestrial lives, the eagle perceives the connection of all things. That, from a place of love, interventions of care and kindness, respect and reciprocity ripple across the connections between us. And, if we take a broad enough perspective, all of our challenges are collective challenges, the responsibility of us all. No single person is individually responsible for their challenges, but it becomes a shared responsibility, requiring acts of holistic love to intervene in ways that are supportive, nurturing, and rooted in care. In this way, eagles serve as guides to enable us to act from the best places within us. For this reason, the eagle was chosen as a symbol of the overall guiding principles of the integration of the Circle of Care into policies and programs.

The principles chosen for guiding the *initial* design and implementation of the Circle of Care were the Seven Sacred Teachings of the Anishinaabe: truth, love, respect, courage, honesty, humility, and wisdom. There are many iterations of these teachings, and many stories that impart their wisdom – those presented by Buskatawang (2024, in Appendix 7) are only one example, but a fitting illustration of their merits as guiding principles. These teachings have also been used elsewhere in the literature as guiding principles, not only to live by, but to develop and implement community programming (Wesley-Esquimaux & Calliou, 2010), and educational policy (Duncan, et al., 2022). As an overarching framework, the 7 Sacred Teachings of the Anishinaabe supply a guide through which to vet and inform policies that align with and satisfy the goals of the Circle of Care.

However, based on feedback from Damon in our follow-up interview, and Lilian in our closing pipe ceremony, these guiding values can be, and ought to be interchanged for other knowledge systems to make the policy transferrable to other diverse Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. In order to make the Circle of Care transferrable to diverse communities, this overarching framework should be fluid and be able to be overlain with value systems of diverse traditions (for example Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit Principles (Nunavut Impact Review Board, n.d.), or Ininenew notions of nehiyaw pimatisiwin (Wahpimaskwasis / Makokis, 2008), or even non-Indigenous moral frameworks). Lilian Bonito had added that providing this adaptation would make the policy more transferrable and universal, embracing diversity amongst Indigenous and non-Indigenous traditions.

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK - THEME 1: ECHOES OF THE ORIGINAL PROBLEM

Excluding the one participant who could not be reached for feedback, the other six participants all noted that, while the research results are accurate and helpfully framed, the

Original Problem remains: Western governments do not incorporate Indigenous-based solutions to complex issues, except as a matter of window-dressing or symbolic gesture. As my journey through this research topic has progressed, a pattern emerges like an undercurrent through the data, or the ley line I mentioned earlier. The colonial hegemonic order is alive and well, and its maintenance is ensured by the suppression of alternative worldviews.

However, hegemonies are predicated on superiority – both from a supposedly objective narratives (e.g., "Western civilization", or "progress"), and through rhetorically normalized outcomes of practice (e.g., Churchill's quote, "...democracy is the worst form of government except for *all those other forms that have been tried*..." (International Churchill Society, 2016, para 1, emphasis added)). These claims form the foundational basis from which hegemonic authority is derived, and challenges to that authority are routinely met with force (Cunneen & Tauri, 2019). If policies rooted in alternative epistemologies begin to illustrate the limitations and inferiority of Western socio-political and judicial practices, the legitimacy and stability of that hegemonic order is placed at risk.

However, taking a holistic perspective of the modern world, the hegemonic order *is* at risk, not only by such critiques, but increasingly by its own devices. The concept of the colonial boomerang illustrates this toxic relationship, whereby Western colonial empires revisit their colonial tendencies (ie., surveillance, exploitation, extraction) upon their own people with the same rhetorical *you should be grateful I'm doing this for you* paternalism that has persisted throughout colonialism (Milfull, 2008). Similarly, considering the ideas presented in Nancy Fraser's (2023) *Cannibal Capitalism: How our System is Devouring Democracy, Care, and the Planet and What can we do About it* the hegemonic orders that have existed for many years are consuming the systems they depend upon, creating an increasingly fragile configuration. The

apparatuses that have colonized, oppressed, and exploited marginalized peoples are enacted upon the broader population as a final frontier of colonial governance.

Maintaining the aquatic metaphor of this thesis, a colonial ship requires the ballast of an acquiescent population in order to maintain the stability from which colonization can operate. If that ballast becomes a target of oppression and marginalization and is displaced, the vessel's equilibrium is lost, and at some point the ship will capsize. As such, the colonial system appears to be both in a state of existential peril, and potential rebirth.

When this consideration is brought in touch with diverse Indigenous epistemologies and policy-based possibilities, a further vision emerges. As Little Bear (2000) indicates, "The idea of all things being in constant motion or flux leads to a holistic and cyclical view of the world" (p. 79, as cited in Absolon, 2016), which suggests that historical configurations of power do not determine future orders.

With a First Nations Premier in Manitoba, and many Indigenous provincial ministers the figurative terrain upon which our rivers currently flow, is in some ways, novel. There remains much work to be done, and many of the proposals and initiatives that have come out of the current provincial administrative team have been problematic (e.g., 72-hour sobering facility has many carceral undertones, austerity-based social policies have been largely maintained, etc.). However, despite these setbacks, there remains hope that even *representation* in the legislative assembly is an indication that the currents may be shifting, and novel opportunities may be present that did not exist in the past.

Our current place and time reminds me of Damon's assertion from the initial interview, "the door has opened for Indigenous leaders to truly change this country for the better, but we've got to walk through it... and ...convince other Canadians that our solutions are real."

THEME 2: PATHS FORWARD

Indigenous ways of knowing are making relevant and important contributions towards social change, but the best application or most fertile ground for that incorporation in modernity is a complicated question (Absolon, 2016). In line with Josh's recommendation, there is some evidence to suggest opportunities for incorporating Indigenous values and priorities within governmental spaces (Althaus & O'Faircheallaigh, 2022), but as we've discussed in the section describing neo-colonial tokenism, holding marginalized viewpoints within hegemonic power structures is bound up in adversity and performativity.

I feel as though one cannot predict wherein the seeds of an idea will germinate, and at what time a society's psyche is fertile enough to embrace an alternative. What is plain to see is that the status quo methods our leadership has selected are woefully ill-suited to address the issues that are the motivation of this thesis. And, while hegemonic power structures may resist the integration of the ideas outlined above due to necessary subordination of colonized voices, perhaps this is the time to resist that force. Maybe that's through grassroots integrations of the Circle of Care as a document to inform policy or program design, or maybe its place is in other areas.

I'm reminded of Coulthard and Alfred's (2014) exploration of Sartre's writing on Jews ending antisemitism when they wrote that, "Ending antisemitism... requires existential self-affirmation be cashed out in a transformative engagement with these generative conditions..." (p. 136). We have seen Wab Kinew as a self-affirming Premier of Manitoba in drumming circles, singing traditional songs, *owning* his Indigeneity within a colonial system. That self-affirmation and political presence that communicated genuineness, and alternative ways of being are some of the reasons I voted for his provincial leadership. Perhaps now is the time for that affirmation to

be *cashed out* as transformative engagement with the generative conditions of anti-Indigenous colonialism. Now may be the time to Indigenize our systems.

WHERE THE WATERS CARRY US

This thesis examined substance use and the criminalization of communities through Indigenous Knowledges, lived experience, and policy analysis utilizing a TribalCrit analytical framework. Through conversations with research participants, three interrelated themes emerged: *the colonial undertow of white waters*, *where the rivers meet*, and *the great river ahead*. Together, these themes illuminated the historic, systemic, and structural roots of substance use challenges and community criminalization, as well as the possibilities for policy transformation grounded in relational, holistic, and accountable approaches. *The colonial undertow of white waters* demonstrated that substance use and community criminalization cannot be parsed out from the ongoing machinations of hegemonic colonialism. Participants articulated how governmental policy, as illustrated in the *enforcement* pillar within the Safer Streets Safer Lives Action Plan (SSSLAP), supported through hostile rhetoric, reproduces colonial methods of control, surveillance, and punishment while being legitimized through *consultation* and claims of public safety. From a TribalCrit perspective, these dynamics are arguably not a policy failure but an integral component of ongoing policy design, wherein status quo, white hegemonic interests are maintained, and reconciliation is symbolic, and lacks accountability or follow-through, providing the appearance of progress without substantial structural change.

Where the rivers meet revealed the epistemological and lived tension experienced by participants navigating Indigenous and Western worlds simultaneously. Their experience revealed anxiety and tension, but also possibility and opportunity. Participants expressed cautious optimism that Indigenous Knowledges, rooted in relationality, mutual accountability,

and holistic epistemology offer more effective responses to complex social issues than Western, reductive, linear policy frameworks. Guided by a Two-Eyed Seeing approach, this research recognizes both the opportunities and limitations of working within (and from) Western epistemic, academic, and policy spaces, while Indigenous research methods affirm a moral obligation to challenge hierarchies that privilege Eurocentric, Western ways of knowing. Gazing forward, *the great river ahead* outlined conditions for reconciliatory governance, including the *Circle of Care* - an Indigenous-based framework comprised of *homefires, hands held in community, restoring the sacred heart, and support through the seasons* - which reframes substance use not as an individual failing requiring carceral retribution, but as a place-based, holistic response to historical and ongoing harms across families, communities, cultures, and lifespans. Taken as a whole, this research affirms the thesis that diverse Indigenous Knowledges are well-suited to providing holistic ameliorations to these complex issues. However, the original problem remains: colonial systems marginalize Indigenous-based solutions unless they do not disrupt existing power structures. Meaningful change therefore requires more than symbolic inclusion; it requires a re-envisioning of policy processes and a redistribution of authority so that Indigenous Peoples can hold legitimate power to shape the systems that govern our collective futures.

As we move through our collectively evolving, flowing, changing river I am drawn back to Damon's profound question in our first interview: *how far are we willing to go to help each other?*

LIMITATIONS

Although this was an important and valuable study, it is not without limitations that are important to mention. The greatest limitation I foresaw at the outset was linguistic, but not

merely in a literal, translational sense. Kovach (2009) states that "Language is a central component to Indigenous epistemologies…" (p. 61). This notion produces a multifaceted challenge as a native English speaker, whose knowledge is rooted in Western epistemologies. Firstly, my education in Indigenous cultural practices, stories, and ways of being have been learned well into adulthood, translated into English. Therefore, my capacity to accurately interpret the meaning of the content of the interviews could be called into question, as previously explored in the potentially problematic incorporation of a Two-Eyed Seeing Approach. This was in part mitigated by checking for accuracy of the policy proposal and summary document with the research participants, and Lilian Bonito (O'Connor & Gibson, 2003). ep

Further, I recognize that I come to this research with my own set of assumptions about substance use and criminalization. Through my experiences, I have developed assumptions that much of addiction is historically based, and in the case of Indigenous inhabitants of Turtle Island, is largely a result of, and perpetuated by, colonialism. Additionally, my work in marginalized communities with criminal justice involvement has led me to believe that a great deal of criminal activity is attributable to poverty and a lack of systemic, social, and economic inclusion. This may have played a role in the manifestation of the research; however, appears to be a view shared by the research participants.

A further limitation may be that those that are sharing information may not have shared openly. It is a well-known fact that white people have endeavoured to study Indigenous Peoples for hundreds of years, primarily to the detriment of Indigenous Peoples. History has shown that sharing can be a dangerous practice. I have done what is within my power to assuage those concerns and ensure that the knowledge shared, re-storied, and interpreted with honesty, transparency, reciprocity and following the OCAP principles (Schnarch, 2004).

Lastly, due to the nature of this research engaging with seven individuals from the community, the results form a particular representation of diverse Indigenous perspectives of substance use, criminalization, and remediations, but is by no means an all-encompassing perspective of the totality of Indigenous perspectives. For example, despite my efforts, the majority of perspectives provided were from Anishinaabe Peoples. These perspectives are but a fraction of the diverse Indigenous Knowledges that exist within our city and province. As a result, despite being an expansion beyond Western perspectives, they remain limited and should be viewed as a valid exploration and an illustration of the possibility but limited in scope.

CHAPTER 9 – CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK

Analysing the Safer Streets Safer Lives Action Plan through a critical Indigenous lens, as provided by TribalCrit, and collaborating with Indigenous research participants to develop an alternative action plan based in diverse Indigenous Knowledges has proven to be a meaningful project with tangible relevance for our shared community. The analysis has demonstrated that the legacies of colonialism, well known among research participants, are being reproduced through contemporary policies, and as a result we collectively recreate social, moral, and societal harms, with particular impact upon Indigenous community members. The Progressive Conservative's Safer Streets Safer Lives Action Plan represents a status quo approach to substance use and criminalization, with a few elements of hope nestled within. Furthermore, the policy's lack of input from Indigenous community members subjugates and subordinates Indigenous interests through the underlying assumptions and orientations, thereby perpetuating negative outcomes with disproportionate impact on Indigenous communities.

The findings support Brayboy's assertion that white supremacy is endemic within society and that contemporary policies tend to prioritize white, Western hegemonic interests above Indigenous ones. They also suggest that Brayboy's recommendation that storytelling is a valid method of robust policy formation is supported by the literature as it relates to substance use and criminalization of communities. From this perspective, the success of this approach may be understood as an existential threat to hegemonic systems rooted in white supremacy. As evidenced by the literature, the Indigenous-based alternative policy is a more holistic and formidable approach to addressing substance use and criminalization of communities than the SSSLAP.

It is also worth recognizing that social policy is not a zero-sum game. It is possible to integrate Indigenous Knowledges and recommendations into the governmental apparatus, without discarding the whole project and starting anew. There are indications that the integration of diverse Indigenous Knowledges may be a powerful antidote to the limitations of reductive, Western approaches to complex social challenges. Antiquated punitive measures to address social harms must change if we are to ever move towards a more compassionate, equitable, functional society that takes care of their most vulnerable and downtrodden in ways that are holistic, relational, respectful and reciprocal.

As social workers, we have a moral and ethical duty to seek out ameliorative solutions to complex challenges that are simultaneously effective, as well as anti-colonial, emancipatory, and do no harm. By prioritizing holistic Indigenous ways of knowing, being, seeing, and doing – with due respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility to Indigenous community members and taking measures to ensure this incorporation of this knowledge is not exploitative or extractive – social workers are presented with an opportunity to collaboratively apply effective solutions for the benefit of all our relations.

Lastly, the notion that *the methods that will heal the community, will come from the community* has proven a valid position with respect to this thesis. This project has sought to act as a platform upon which to gather those voices, knowledges, and solutions from the community and bring them into a focussed piece of text and I believe it has succeeded in that aim.

EPILOGUE

On the day of my first journal entry for this project, December 2020, I remember writing, alone in my living room – my first child, Charlotte – barely a month old - asleep upstairs with my wife, Stephanie. I had finally determined what my thesis topic would be, and I began to write with some relief that a path – *some path* was ahead of me. And as I wrote, I heard a strange and unusual noise, like a *hooting* outside my house. Living in Winnipeg, I don't recall *ever* hearing an owl. But when I heard it a second time, in the dead of winter, I had to look outside.

I stood out on my porch and scanned the trees above Westminster Avenue, not really expecting to see it - but there it was – as big as my upper torso, sitting in an old elm, overhanging the yard. A huge owl. It made no sound now. And I watched it, awestruck.

Then, without so much as a whisper, it spread its huge white and grey wings and coasted across the street, through the darkness and branches and disappeared into the night.

As I reflect on that night, that visitor, I think about the wisdom that exists that is beyond my comprehension. I think about the forces of this world that are out of sight but guide us in ways we cannot comprehend. I think about what my vision was for this project at the outset and what it became – the connections I made, not only to people, but to the *knowledge* within this text. The depth of understanding that has emerged in this process of exploration has changed *who I am and how I see the world*. And as I sit here and write this conclusion, five years later, I feel like that owl knew.

This one's going to change you.

Then it flew off into the darkness.

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APPENDIX 1

Questions to Guide Interview

The following is a list of the questions that I will utilize to guide the sharing of information in the semi-structured interviews.

What is your understanding of substance use in Winnipeg?

What is your understanding of the relationship between substance use and crime?

Based on Indigenous ways of knowing, being, seeing, and doing, if you had the power to apply any measures you saw fit, how would you address the issues of substance use and substance use-related crime in Winnipeg?

APPENDIX 2

Safer Streets Safer Lives Action Plan Reference Material

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APPENDIX 3

Horseman's Story of Police Violence

Horseman relayed a story about his 3 sons raking up grass in his front lawn in Point Douglas. He recalled, "[watching] from my bay window, [Winnipeg Police] put on gloves in their car to get out and talk to my kids. Now, why do you think they were putting on their stab proof gloves to deal with teenage boys ...an 8 year old, or 7 year old? Why would they do that? Why would they have to put Kevlar gloves on? So, I go outside... and tell my sons, "get in the yard." And [the police]'re like, "hey, we're talking to them." I said, "you didn't even approach them. I've been watching you –get in the yard. So, what... do you guys want here?' 'What's with the attitude?' And I said, 'bro, I watched you put those gloves on. You were gonna manhandle my kids.' 'no...no.' I said, 'Why do you have your Kevlar gloves on? You think I'm fucking stupid? I've been dealing with you dickheads all my life, I know what you were gonna do to these boys. They're good boys. Did you get a call?' 'Well...' And I said, 'So, you're here unofficially. You mean you didn't even have a call to be in my yard, but you were getting ready to take these boys down?' 'no, no. We didn't touch them.' I said, 'Waid a minute. You didn't touch them, but you also said you were talking to them, which you weren't talking to them.' I told them, 'you guys are so terrible. You are so fucking horrible. Get the fuck out of here.' That's what I had to tell them. And when my youngest son, I tell him, 'these are not your friends. These people are not your friends. You do not trust them.' And that's what we have to instill in our children until those relationships change."

APPENDIX 3

Levi's Proposal for Managing Encampments

...people are like, "Well, okay, why are people in encampments?" But I'm like, encampments are the closest thing that we have to traditional housing in cultural knowledge systems that we inherit, that are, that are, you know, biologically ingrained into Indigenous- into Anishinaabe people. And the the way that you- that we solve housing, is that you give all of the power to Indigenous people to take care of their housing. Because in -in the, you know, the five Indigenous nations that currently live in the territory of Manitoba - so you have like the Dakota, the Anishinaabe, the Cree, the Oji Cree, the Dene, the Inuit, and even then, the Metis, all of those people had a -they were provided the resources through the land to have their own home, and then they maintained their own home, and they designed their home based on cultural frameworks, and they had a responsibility within the community to take care of their own home and to take their home with them. And so home in that concept is malleable. Now I think about the way that in my life, how I've avoided homelessness a lot of the time is through social housing, and social - and housing that's provided by the government and by the state. So that includes living in Manitoba Housing, and that includes living on reserve. Both of those concepts would be very, very foreign in traditional knowledges, and were very foreign in our own families, because in our homes, we would have men, whether they be husbands, brothers, uncles or clan relations, who would go out and harvest the materials, and the women would construct it, maintain it and decide who lives there. And it would be our responsibility throughout our entire lives to be not only learning about what our role is in maintaining and owning homes, and because we owned that, that was ours- It was one of the -when people say that Anishinaabe people don't have concepts of ownership- We have lots of concepts of ownership. We don't have

concepts of ownership of land, because we know what belonging, what physical belongings belong to us. And so, if we really wanted to solve homelessness, you would go and you would be like, here's how we're going to- here's how you can provide for yourself and your community. So my gift, if we go back in the day, like, okay, I can sew. So if I lived in- and I'm not a very good, necessarily, designer. I'm not an engineer, so I wouldn't have the, you know, the engineering role that maybe my brother would have of being able to go and harvest the birch bark and knowing which pieces are going to fit where. But I would have a very useful skill in, you know, creating the hides that would help with ventilation and the internal... the insulation. So that would be my skill. So my whole life, I would be doing that. And that would be what I'd be able to transfer to, whatever home I was invited to live into. Perhaps because I was Two Spirit, I would have my own Lodge. Perhaps, if I was- because I'm Two Spirit, and, you know, I had orphaned relatives, they would come and live in my Lodge, and it would be my responsibility to kind of learn about that. So, now I'm not like- the feasibility of, you know, us going to an encampment and being like, each one of you tell me your skill and now you're gonna all go build each other's homes, is it's realistic in some some capacity, like, if you have a number of folks who were like, This is why I said to Tessa from the from the province, I was like, "you know what you should do is you should- if a lot of these people are never going to leave encampments, you have to, we have to accept that. So, like, a real alternative would be like, well, let's set up villages somewhere. You have- Manitoba has land, and you have people who are willing to be resourceful and self sustaining. And we have lots of communities who do this. We have Hutterites, and we have lots of closed off communities. But anyways, that's a side piece. So there's lots of options there, but the all of those concepts are still there. And again- and it points back to that other thing about connection and constant connection- and one of the things about- you can build connection, I can

connect with you on a number of different things right now, but doesn't necessarily mean we enter into relationship.

Appendix 4

Levi's Story of Vaccine Success in Northern Indigenous Communities

...those three doctors, when they developed the COVID response, because we had a Conservative government who was just like, you know, Brian Pallister was out there saying shitty things about Indigenous peoples, but they were able to develop one of the most effective vaccine programs in the country -in North America for Indigenous peoples in Manitoba- for First Nations people in Manitoba, because they were able to work on their own. And because they were able to learn from their experiences in H1N1 particular - Dr Anderson and Dr Lavallee. And so because of that, we were -they, they, they had, they achieved rates of vaccines that were, you know, higher and more -and more sustained than the general population. And if you look at the statistics, Indigenous peoples are always the "problem" when it comes to vaccines, always the "problem" when it comes to treatment - But it's not the case. We will very actively engage in our own health care and our own- make good health decisions if we can trust the system. And they created systems that people could trust, and they could go to. And it was beyond- I had some conversations with some colleagues. "Well, of course, Indigenous Peoples were gonna get vaccinated because they would go there and they would get snacks, and they would get, you know, you know, there'd be childcare," something like that, and that's fucked up that you didn't get that, you know? It's fucked up that you went to a vaccine clinic and they didn't offer you an apple or an orange or, like, a cookie or something, just because it's, you know, you need something to kind of nurse you. Maybe you didn't eat because you're afraid of needles, or whatever you should, you know, have childcare when you're going to get healthcare treatment. That- that's an obvious, that's an obvious thing. Like, why wouldn't you? And it's fucked up that you would want to take that away from a community that built that for themselves. Like, I think then that's really, that's really the problem.

APPENDIX 5

Summary Document for Research Participants on the Indigenous-Based Policy Proposal to Address Substance Use and Criminalization of Communities in Winnipeg

Presented by Mark Granger

As part of MSW Thesis Project

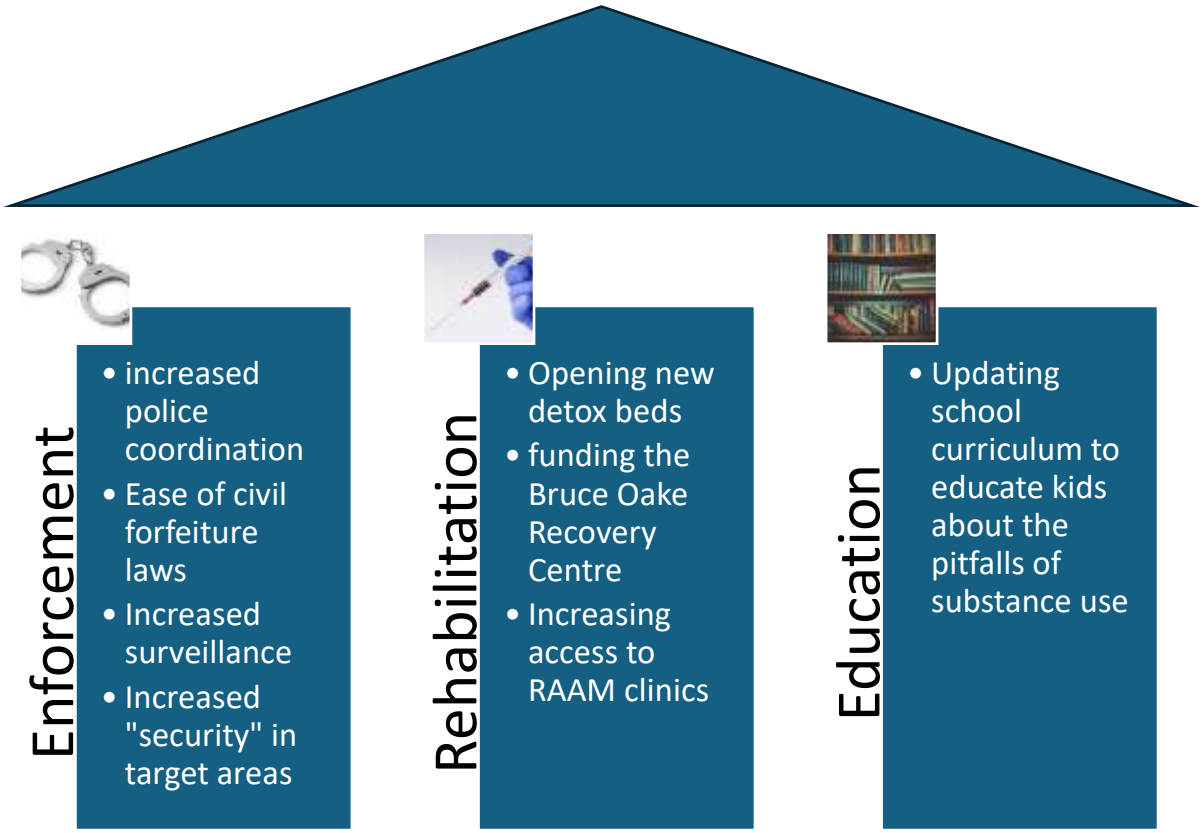
October 21, 2025

Introduction

This project was initiated as a response to, and counterpoint of typical neo-colonial policies put forward by governments to address community substance use, and criminalization of marginalized community members. Policies of this type are very common, but for this project, the 2019 Safer Streets Safer Lives Action Plan (SSSLAP) was selected for its steadfast adherence to the status quo.

SSSLAP Summary

In response to the election climate in 2019, which was situated in escalating concerns regarding use of methamphetamine and its co-occurring challenges in the community, the Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba put forward the SSSLAP - a "3-pillared" approach to respond to the "meth crisis."



The prioritization of "enforcement" both in terms of publicity and funding made plain that the SSSLAP was going to result in further exacerbation of incarceration of marginalized folks (primarily Indigenous), with all its accompanying physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual ills. Rehabilitation and education had potential to have positive impacts, depending on how they

were implemented. However, 6 years later and very little has changed, with very marginal fluctuation in rates of people in carceral settings (StatsCan, 2025), marginal increases in property crime (1.3% over 5 years), and a notable increase in violent crime (increase 11.7% over 5 years) (Winnipeg Police Service Crime Map). Additionally, this policy failed to address any social determinants of health, aside from slightly increasing access to detox and treatment beds.

Motivation for Research

Indigenous Peoples have historically borne the brunt of hardship of status quo policies aimed at substance use and criminalization in a variety of ways (incarceration, asset forfeiture, family disruption, etc.), and governments tend to neglect Indigenous voices in policy formation. Also, Indigenous Knowledges, from a holistic, relational, spiritual perspective have a great deal to offer with respect to solutions for complex issues, especially in instances where Indigenous Peoples are disproportionately affected.

Model for Indigenous Based Policy Formation

7 Indigenous research participants from Winnipeg, who are leaders in their respective fields of practice (which includes working with individuals who engage in substance use, and are often criminalized), spoke with myself to present their understanding on substance use and community criminalization, with a specific focus on Winnipeg, Manitoba, and to offer solutions based on their unique perspectives. Mark compiled and analyzed the transcripts from the conversations and distilled the following Indigenous-based policy proposal to address substance use and community criminalization from an Indigenous perspective.

Circle of Care (fig. 1.1 – presented on following page)

The Circle of Care is a counterpoint to the SSSLAP in design, purpose, and epistemological orientation.

Firstly, from a design perspective, the 4-quadrant presentation of the wheel is a common metaphor for presenting a whole, comprised of 4 parts, in diverse Indigenous Knowledges. Pillars, on the other hand are a throwback to Western, euro-centric values and imagery.

Secondly, in my relational analysis of the information presented in the interviews, I found time and again that the research participants didn't talk much about addressing "substance use," per se. What they usually spoke of was addressing the impacts of colonialism, and neo-colonial affects (e.g., disconnection from culture, community-based challenges, issues surrounding identity, meaning within the broader context of community or the. cosmos, etc.). So, the policy proposed centres on healing, restoring balance, and establishing diverse forms of care from a holistic perspective, rather than engaging in punitive, linear, reductive corrective measures.

Lastly, each of the aspects of the wheel are an equally important, inter-related part of the whole of approaching the restoration of balance. They are mutually supportive, interwoven, and related to the holistic aim of wellness and prosperity.

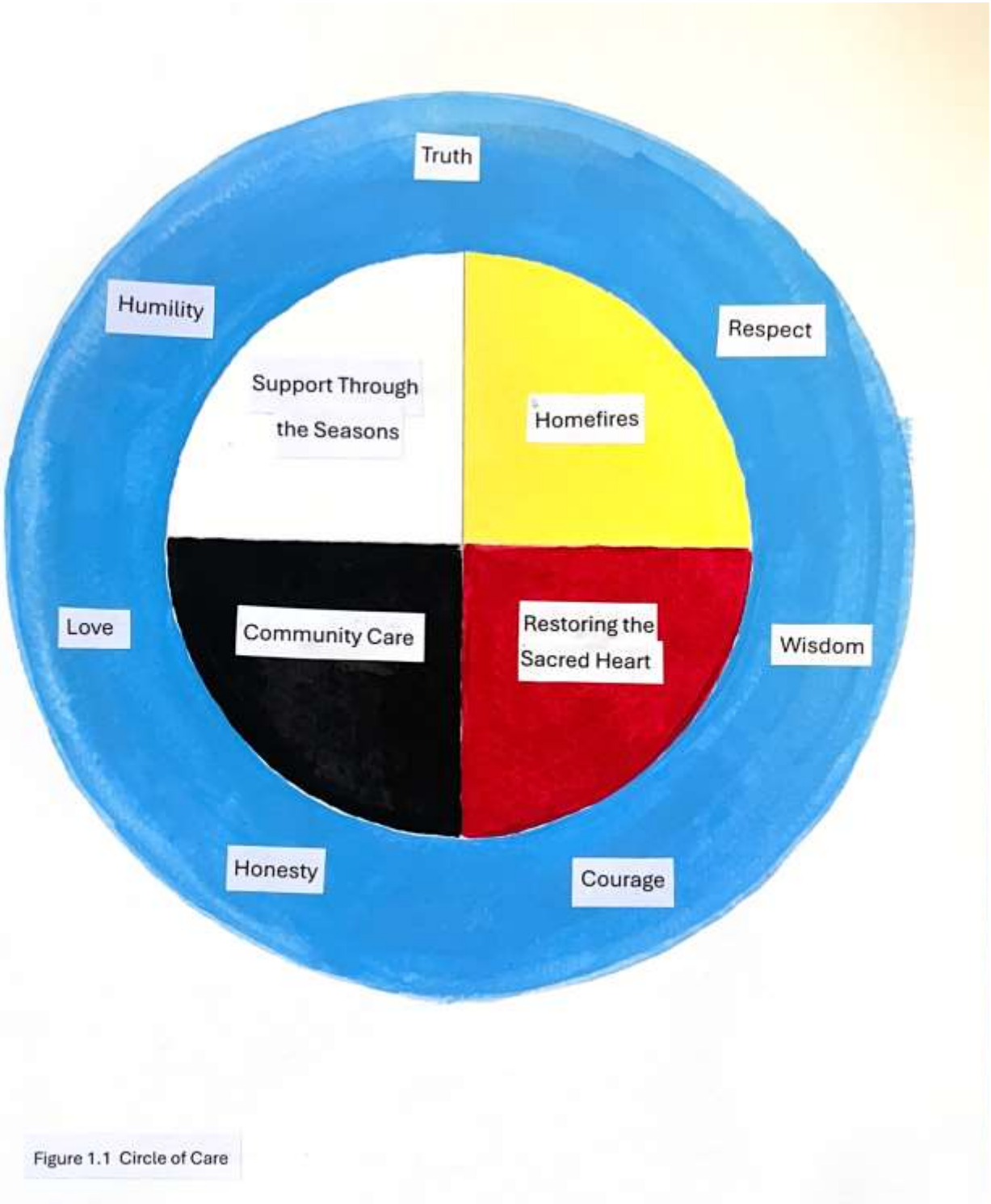


Figure 1.1 Circle of Care

Homefires

The "homefire" was a term used to encapsulate not only one's home and family, parents, children and extended family, but also the values and culture within the home unit, the relationships and stability, as well as the health, physical, and non-physical resources, and nourishment within. Imbalance within the homefire acts as an antagonist, creating the conditions precipitous of substance use disorders – whether that's disruption of the family unit, unaddressed trauma among family members, circumstances of poverty, lack of education, opportunity, cultural disconnection – each of these things are aspects of the homefire that need tending and, once addressed, balanced, and properly healed, can become protective factors.

Priorities for funding based on research within the thesis include but are not limited to: family enhancement programming (e.g., relational enrichment, trauma-informed care, perenting programming and resources) and poverty reduction.

Restoring the Sacred Heart

The need for restoring and reintegrating Indigenous cultural values, knowledges, and spirituality into systems of healing, rehabilitation, and community wellness was also universally recognized among research participants as a prerequisite for success and one of the greatest opportunities for positively impacting problematic substance use in the community. I would also assert that there was no single "area of priority" for the integration of Indigenous Knowledges, but more so the need to be integrated in all areas of service.

Priorities for funding: increasing access to Indigenous cultural activities, land-based activities, and spiritual practices by creating more opportunities for engagement, learning, and participation.

Hands Held in Community

Community held a pivotal role throughout the interviews, both as a means of ameliorating challenges related to substance use, but also as a corrective for other criminalized behaviours. Community itself was seen as a potential healer *of* the community members; as a maintainer of accountability and mutual aid. Community was articulated as a reciprocal, relational network of healing, engagement, empowerment, and enlightenment if it is cultivated properly.

Priorities: facilitating community connections, community beautification projects, and funding other community projects.

Support Through the Seasons

Research participants often referred to the need for continuity of care across the lifespan, and across circumstances, noting that a lack of continuity of care was a significant antagonist of undue hardship, which often leads to precarity and substance use challenges.

Priorities: enhanced bridging of services for kids aging out of the child welfare system, transitional supports for those exiting the carceral system, and healthcare follow up.

Guiding Principles

The outer ring around the Circle of Care is filled with the 7 Sacred Teachings – which most of the research participants spoke of during the course of their interviews. The 7 principles (truth, honesty, humility, respect, love, courage, and wisdom) in this context are a holistic guide for the implementation and application of programming or funding emerging from the above areas of prioritization.

Conditions for Success

Beyond the Circle of Care, as an alternative policy priority, research participants also highlighted the need for adherence to the following principles in order to move forward with policy implementations "in a good way." These principles are also inter-related and need to be tended to in an ongoing way. They require further research to identify how best to implement them and have not been sufficiently researched for this project. They are: governmental accountability, governmental equity for Indigenous Peoples, and autonomy and self-governance.

Governmental Accountability

Participants made frequent mention of the ways in which governments are *not* held accountable for either failing to implement the findings of various public inquiries, or failing to follow through on promises made to the general population about obligations to Indigenous Peoples. In response, they indicated there needs to be accountability mechanisms implemented to ensure obligations are met, and targets are adhered to.

Governmental Equity

Indigenous Peoples need to have a "seat at the table" (with respect to all matters of import) with equal voice, power, and administrative authority of their non-Indigenous counterparts. Consultation, representation, and participation without equal power and authority is tokenism – which disempowers Indigenous communities and is a disservice to all parties interested in moving forward in good faith towards reconciliation and other positive outcomes.

Autonomy and Self-Governance

Indigenous Peoples have a right to administer their own programming, services, laws and traditions, and are the most suitable arbiters of their own interests. Each place-based Peoples are most familiar with the needs of their own communities, as well as the relevant customs, and remedies for given challenges, and they should be afforded the funding and autonomy to implement the methods that they see fit.

Appendix 6

Leo Baskatawang's (2024) Interpretation of the Seven Sacred Teachings, from Basil Johnson's Ojibway Heritage (1976)

While many of the connections I have made in Indigenous communities have shared teachings surrounding each of these teachings, the writing of legal scholar Leo Baskawatang (2024) relates each of the teachings to a legal framework, providing a clear articulation of each one, which is succinct and useful in this context. He draws on the Anishinaabe creation story, which describes the creation of all things, and with that story the meaning of each of the sacred teachings are conveyed.

Baskawatang, drawing from Basil Johnston's Ojibway Heritage (1976), articulates that in the beginning of creation, Gitchi Manitou (the great Creator) created the earth, air, fire and water and breathed life into each of them. And, because each of these things were created from the sacred breath of Creator, each deserves our unwavering *respect* as equally sacred creations – both the living and non-living (by Western metrics). He continues that after these elements were created, Gitchi Manitou created the plant folk, and the animals – both imbued with a variety of gifts. But humankind was last; fragile, frail and without most of the gifts of either plants or animals. So, humans had to be humble and learn from the other gifted entities, as well as their place in relation to all other entities – *humility.*

In the celestial realm a tragedy occurs when Spirit Woman loses her child and begins to cry. She weeps until the world is a sea of tears and the ground is consumed by the flood. The birds sing to her in consolation and offer her to join them on earth. She agrees and joins the animals on turtle's back. They confront her with the harm she has caused with her tears. She accepts responsibility, and tells them of her own loss, but promises to make things right again.

Honesty is imparted, by apologizing, taking responsibility and looking for ways to repair the damage done.

In her exploration to restore balance, she asks the animals to help attain soil from the bottom of the lake, which had overtaken the earth. Each of the animals try, but are unable to complete the task, until only the lowly muskrat is left. Despite his tiny stature and meek existence, he manages to swim to the depths, risking his life where others had failed, and nearly dying in the process, attains a small piece of earth from which Spirit Woman rebuilds the land. The muskrat teaches *bravery.* Once the land was established, Spirit Woman, in time conceives two children - twins, the Anishinaabe – the first people of Turtle Island, who she raises alone. The animals take pity and support the small family until winter comes. As food becomes scarce, the twins become more and more weak and undernourished, until bear sacrifices himself to feed the family and keep them warm. In this ultimately selfless act, the bear teaches *love*.

As time goes on, a sickness afflicts the people of Turtle Island and Gitchi Manitou sends Nanabush – half spirit, half man, to teach the inhabitants to live a good life once more. While delivering his teachings, Nanabush learns that the West Wind (his father) had killed his mother when he was a baby and confronts the West Wind. After a long battle, Nanabush establishes his equality in battle, both entities noting they cannot vanquish the other. So, the West Wind gifts Nanabush a pipe, which they smoke in a spirit of peace and goodwill until they are reconciled. This story is meant to convey *wisdom*. Nanabush, in overcoming anger and grief, realizes that violence will get nowhere, and embraces peace and reconciliation as the path forward.

Nanabush lives among the Anishinaabe for a long time, sharing teachings and imparting knowledge. Among those teachings is that the earth is like one's mother, who provides for all, yet requires care and respect. Her care is entrusted to the people, and they may never own her.

For she will outlive us all, and any notion of ownership is an illusion, or a lie. Herein lies the teaching of *truth* (Baskawatang, 2024).