Walk With Me:
Sharing Space Along the Path

"Exploring key elements required to build Indigenous and non-Indigenous alliances that best support peaceful and productive relationships and outcomes"

by

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If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time.
But if you have come because your liberation
is bound up with mine, then let us work together.
Lila Watson (born 1940)
Elder, educator, and activist

Abstract

This qualitative participatory action-based re-search explores Indigenous and non-Indigenous women's learning practice within grassroots community groups in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Privileging Indigenous women's perspectives and guided by a Community Advisory Group of Indigenous Women, this study invited both Indigenous and non-Indigenous allies to participate in a dialogue and knowledge sharing. The narratives are based on the fundamental experience of being involved with Indigenous-women lead movements through community work grounded in cultural perspective and experience in comparison to mainstream movements that typically perpetuate a colonial agenda. Their knowledge and stories of lived experiences revealed key elements and strategies that generated seven key guide tips that provide insight for non-Indigenous Peoples interested and ready to share space along the path with Indigenous communities in ways that will best support relationships needed to create a new future. The seven guide tips are: relationships matter, power and perspective, words matter, get comfortable being uncomfortable, finding common ground, the gifts of conflict, and commitment to reflection, ongoing development and learning.

Together, Canadians must do more than just *talk* about reconciliation;
We must learn how to *practice* reconciliation in our everyday lives.
The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015

Acknowledgement of Land

As a student of the University of Manitoba, and visitor to the area, I acknowledge Treaty 1, and the traditional treaty of the Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Métis Nation.

Throughout the journey of completing this work, I relocated back to Northwestern Ontario and wish to also acknowledge the Robinson Superior Treaty Area, land of Anishinaabe[1] Peoples.

[1] You will notice the different spelling of Anishinaabeg and Anishinaabe, although both Ojibway words, there is a difference in dialect that impacts spelling. Another example is Miigwetch and Miigwech, one uses 't' and the other doesn't; both are correct within their languages.

Honouring, Recognition, and Dedication

It is with the most deeply heartfelt gratitude that I acknowledge the women who have graciously and courageously agreed to “share space on the path and walk with me” during this journey. Your contributions have truly informed and guided this body of work called a thesis.

I openly acknowledge my privileged advantage to access education and further the opportunity to submit this work as partial completion of my degree. I cannot accept it without declaring that this work is not possible without the contributions of the women who walked with me throughout and/or at different moments on this journey:

Contributing Indigenous women and leaders:
Grandmothers Roxanne Shuttleworth and Linda Lamirande, Arlene Mann-Joe, Ko’ona Cochrane, Gladys Rowe, and Linda Murphy. Special acknowledgement to Grandmother Thelma Morrisseau who also contributed as part of the initial informal gathering and review of the proposal.

Contributing non-Indigenous women and leaders:
Grandmother Mary Anne Clarke, Laura Normand, Christy Reed, Monique Woroniak, Sheryl Peters, and Kim Hunter

Academic Advisory Committee:
Jessica Senehi, Maureen Flaherty, Mary Jane Logan McCallum

Community Advisory Group:
Grandmothers Velma Orvis & Carol Moar, Vanessa Tait, Wendy McNab, Maxine Boulanger, Sylvia Eastman

Transcriber:
Alison Collins

The voices, stories and wisdom of these women have guided and informed this work. To minimize risk of misinterpretation or taking examples out of context, there will be a combined use of direct quotes and anonymous references.

Miigwetch, Thank You doesn't come close to expressing my gratitude, but it's all I really have with the limited English language and the written word. So, with my sincerest gratitude, I say Miigwetch for walking with me on this journey.

Much Love

Shannon

Acknowledgement of Relations

I have been blessed with many people throughout my lifetime who have had an instrumental impact on who I am today. It is this lived experience that directly influences how this work was constructed. This work belongs more to those I have had the honour to share space with, walking, learning, and growing together than to myself.

To the many Grandmothers who graciously welcomed me into your lives, I honour and thank you for your kindness, patience, wisdom, and trust in sharing with me. Thank you for seeing past the many mistakes I made while lost in the deeply socialized colonial ways, my privilege and vulnerabilities and for seeing my true spirit.

To Leslie Spillett, and all those I had the honour to walk with while connected with Ka Ni Kanichihk, you have forever shaped and informed my own critical reflection of who I was, who I am today, and who I want to still become as an unsettled settler. Leslie and Ka Ni Kanichik will forever hold a respected and loved place in my heart.

To my mom, dad, and brother, you have been my greatest teachers and rocks of strength. No matter what is happening in my life, the one thing I know for sure is the unconditional love, belief and support of home.

To Paul, since we began our journey together you have supported me to grow and transform beyond what I could have believed or achieved on my own. Your belief in me, my potential and encouraging support has never wavered, for this I will be forever grateful.

To Josie and Wil, you are my everything: I love you both to the moon and beyond forever and always. Thank you for the gift of choosing me to be your momma.

To all the people, animals, ideas, or messengers (seen and unseen) who have ever crossed my path whether it has been in life, books, or dreams, I thank you.

Thank You for walking and sharing space with me,

without your support, this work would not be what it is

Welcoming, Creating Space and Reader Response-Ability[2]

The path of this work has now shifted. Up until its final writing, space along the path has been shared with Indigenous and settler women by engaging in reflective dialogue, sharing, and guidance. Now that you hold this paper in your hands, you have similarly joined our path on this journey. As such, before getting too far ahead, I wish to welcome you, the reader, into this space. Although I will formally introduce and locate myself in more detail shortly, my name is Shannon Courtemanche-Cormier. I am the writer of this document, and as you may have determined by the Title Page, one of the reasons for this document is partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts within the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies. This, however, is not the only driving purpose of this work. Let me explain.

I identify as a learning practitioner, before an academic. I have found myself significantly struggling to find a good way to adequately capture the work of this project within the context of a formal academic piece of writing for two reasons. First, I have worked closely with, and under the guidance of, a Community Advisory Group. This group has had input into this project before it was even a project, yet I am not able to list them as co-researchers due to the expectations set out within the academy concerning authorship and ownership. As explained on the University of Manitoba website[3], "students at the U of M have sole copyright ownership over their document that is submitted as requirement of an academic program. However, the document submitted

[2] Revised spelling of English words is used throughout the document for a purpose explained in the Language and Terms for the Path Ahead section

[3] (http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/graduate_studies/thesis/guidelines.html#copyright)

by the student to the U of M becomes the property of the University". I contend that this type of 'ownership based' requirement supports what has become an unchallenged status quo rooted in colonial values\worldviews and not only does goes against the very purpose of this project regardless of my efforts to work from an Indigenous paradigm and developing true collaborative alliances based on just and accountable relationship building. This is an example of how, as we move forward into the next 150 years, there is a significant need for questioning the status quo of current systems and structures while building new relationships. We require all people to challenge the very systems that we are expected to work finding innovative and creative ways to ensure shared power and relational accountability. For the purposes of this work, I ask for you to be mindful that the true owners are the Community Advisory Group and those who agreed to participate in the discussion, not myself, or the academy. I may be the writer, and yes have ownership and responsibility of the contents, but by no means do I agree to hold the sole copyright to this document – if it were not for the voices of those who shared their stories, experiences and thoughts, this document would not have been completed.

The second thing I have been struggling with is finding a way to compose this work that ensures usefulness for both Indigenous community and settlers who wish to share space. I do not want it to be another academic report that simply extracts local knowledge with little reciprocated usefulness beyond an intellectual exercise reinforcing my own privilege as a settler simply attaining a degree. This is part of my response-ability as an academic, to ensure this work is an accurate reflection of the knowledge shared with me and accountable in some way to those who agreed to contribute their time, energy and wisdom.

And so, with these struggles close to my heart and in the forefront of my mind, the next phase of this journey begins. Creating this document as a useful tool beyond merely fulfilling my requirements to attain a degree, and honouring the time, energy and wisdom shared towards its creation, I acknowledge the contributions of the Community Advisory Group and all the women who courageously shared their stories and the work they do each day with their loved ones, families and communities.

I also call upon you, the reader, to not only read the words throughout this paper but observe how the report has been put together, and dare to challenge yourself. As Western educated people, hooks (1984) reminds us that we tend to have internalized assumptions with unchecked, unconscious beliefs and privilege that reinforce structures of inequality and exclusion often hidden within what Peggy McIntosh (1988) describes as an 'invisible knapsack[4]'. Similarly, in order to become a part of a transformative force for social change, Wane (2013) believes it's necessary to re/claim multiple ways of knowing and doing to help people cultivate the capacity to exercise creative potential.

To support this process I have attempted to utilize different forms of articulation throughout such as the use of visual images (pictures taken by myself), in hopes of creating opportunities for the reader to connect the narrative with the knowledge they carry. I believe this will offer greater reflective insight, understanding and practical usage of the material whether it be personally, professionally, visually, spiritually, or mentally. Finally, I have attempted to design and present the work in a way that not only encourages critical reflection but also informs praxis: a bridging of the theoretical with practice.

[4] To learn more about Peggy McIntosh's White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack': http://www.cirtl.net/files/PartI_CreatingAwareness_WhitePrivilegeUnpackingtheInvisibleKnapsack.pdf

As the reader, there are two guiding concepts that are important for you to be aware of as we move forward along the path together. The first is the importance of relational accountability, not to the academy or achieving a degree, but to *the process of* ***how*** *and* ***with whom*** *this work was done,* which I suggest is more important than the actual outcome or product of this document. The second is a concept that originated through the work of Mi'kmaq Elders Murdena and Albert Marshall from Eskasoni First Nation, along with Dr. Cheryl Bartlett at Cape Breton University's Institute for Integrative Science and Health/Toqwa'tu'kl Kjijitaqnn (Iwama, Marshall, Marshall, & Bartlett, 2009) referred to as "two-eyed seeing." Elder Marshall explains two-eyed seeing is "to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing, and to see from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing, and to use both of these eyes together" (Bartlett, Marshall, Marshall, 2012. P. 335). Hall, Dell, Fornssler, Hopkins, Mushquash, and Rowan (2015) confirms two-eyed seeing is recognized by one of Canada's major health research funders as a starting point for bringing together the strengths of Indigenous and Western ways of knowing. We will discuss these two guiding philosophies further into our journey.

I believe you bring your own experience, skills and gifts that influence your perceptions and filters of learning. I challenge you to challenge yourself: question what you know and how you have come to understand what you know. Question what you might not know, and why that may be and become reflective of the space you occupy. How are you able to be where you are on this land today? Not everything in this work will make sense to you, and there may be areas that trigger things within you for better or worse. All I ask is that you walk the path with an open mind and heart, committing to

challenge assumptions that you may carry in your 'invisible backpack' (McIntosh, 1988). Take what makes sense to you, interweave the new insights into your path forward and choose to reflect on triggers that were sparked within you. It is said that when things are triggered within us, it presents windows of opportunity for choosing to respond in anger or to fuel our own growth.

I would never ask of you what I am not willing to do myself. I am fully aware that it's not a matter of *if* mistakes, assumptions, or oversights have been made within this document; it's a matter of *what and how many*. As a self-committed reflective practitioner, author, and lifelong student, I open myself to vulnerabilities and invite you to share your thoughts so we can all continue to learn and grow responsibly. As Kovach (2009) explains "responsibility implies knowledge and action" (p. 178).

This work is but a stepping stone along a much longer path and will by no means be complete or perfect. In the end, all that is hoped for is that it will create a ripple effect being useful in whatever way it is meant to be, supporting the building and/or maintenance of respectful relationships.

Thank you for choosing to share this space and walk with me.

Language and Terms for the Path Ahead

The language we use shapes the way we think
Kovach, 2005, p. 25

The power of words told over generations,
remembered from trees, dreams, and ancestors,
is a power inherent in indigenous cultures,
contained within the fabric of our way of life.
LaDuke, 2006, p. xi

One of the themes that emerged from this work is the power of language. Not only the cultural importance and role of a language itself[5], but also the specific terminology used. Chosen terminology represents something more than just a word. It can ultimately reinforce colonial power dynamics, systems and structures:

> Postmodern deconstructivists have illuminated the link between the dominant society's usage of language to silence the voices of those who are marginally located. It is the tool by which a meta-narrative of "truth" and "normalcy" is perpetually reproduced. In centres of knowledge production like universities, the language of research becomes powerful and pervasive (Kovach, 2005, p. 25).

As indicated by Kovach in this quote, centres of knowledge production, such as universities, have and continue to play a powerful role in the reinforcement and perpetuation of colonial normalcy. Each word is loaded with historical context and meaning depending on the perspective of experience and understanding. Christopher Columbus, for example, is described in mainstream history books as the one who 'discovered' this land; however, if people had already lived on the lands would it not have been the original people who discovered the lost Christopher Columbus? Yes, language is powerful and can be used to manipulate and create understanding from a

[5] Although beyond the scope of this paper, the discussion and understanding of the importance of Indigenous language is crucial and we recommend you learn more about this from Indigenous scholars such as Lorena Sekwan Fontaine https://vimeo.com/165391597 and Brock Pitawanakwat http://web.uvic.ca/igov/uploads/pdf/Pitawanakwat-PhD.2009.pdf

specific lens, which is why it's imperative to be aware of, and mindfully selective of the use of terminology.

Considering the terminology to use when referring to the First Peoples who originated on this land prior to the arrival of explorers, there have been a number of variations, including 'Natives,' 'savages,' 'Indians,' and, more recently, 'Aboriginal' and 'Indigenous'. Likewise, when referring to explorers of this land, words such as 'Euro-Canadians,' 'whites,' 'non-Aboriginal,' 'non-Indigenous,' 'settlers,' and 'colonizers' all pose options. The Canadian government uses the term 'Aboriginal' to include North American Indian (First Nations people), Métis, and Inuit. Alfred and Corntassel (2005) contend that 'Aboriginal' is "purely a state construction that is instrumental to the state's attempt to gradually subsume Indigenous existences into its own constitutional system and body politic since Canadian independence from Britain" (p. 598). Likewise, the term 'Indigenous' is often used to refer to the broader international context of what Canada calls First Peoples in foreign lands whereas more localized references to specific cultural groups include Cree, Ojibway, Dene, Inuit, Red River Half-breeds. Smith (2012) suggests that the word Indigenous "has been coopted politically by the dependents of settlers who lay claim to an 'Indigenous' identity through their occupation and settlement of land over several generations or simply through being born in that place" (p. 7).

With regards to the ongoing question of language and use of terms, Taylor and Sablonniere (2014) further explain:

> We might begin by asking: Why is there such sensitivity surrounding cultural labels for Aboriginal Peoples? "Native Peoples," "Indigenous Peoples," "Aboriginal Peoples," and "First Peoples" are all labels referring to the culturally and linguistically divers inhabitants of North America prior to European colonization. The labels have changed, evolved, and have been used differently in Canada and the United States as a response to changing political and social

> realities. What all these labels emphasize is a category of people who predated Europeans and thereby position themselves as the first inhabitants of the land. And when a people, any people, feel disrespected, group labels take on a special significance" (p. 34).

Overall, there is no real consistency or consensus on what terms are to be used (Sinclair, Hart, & Bruyere, 2009). Different Indigenous Peoples self-identify in many ways, including any number of the previously mentioned terms. Throughout this work, the reader will notice that the most commonly used terms are Indigenous, Native, or Aboriginal; and settler or non-Indigenous. The terms will be utilized interchangeably depending on consistency of thought and use in material being cited. Using an eclectic range of English terms without privileging one over another, is my attempt to 'dis-member' the power of one term over another while also re-membering and honouring the use of Traditional language.

It is also critical to mention the diversity of Indigenous cultures, communities and experiences by acknowledging and naming the specific group of Peoples you are working with the way they choose to be named. The 2011 Census, for example, recorded over 60 different Aboriginal languages that group into 12 distinct language families (Statistics Canada, 2012). This offers just one example of why it is critical to be cautious in making broad overarching generalized statements or assumptions that are pan-Aboriginal and appropriately reflect diverse Indigenous experiences.

Within this project for example, the Community Advisory group comprised of Cree, Ojibway, and Métis Peoples from different places across the prairies. When sharing space and learning to walk with each other, there is value in identifying the commonalities that Peoples share opposed to focusing only on the differences. However, within the shared space of recognizing the commonalities we must also

acknowledge and accept the differences that were also valued as part of the group's strength. By valuing the differences among the group, sharing space offered further opportunity for learning, thereby developing a stronger, depth of collective experience that ultimately increased value for all.

When deciding on terminology, it's important to realize that whatever is decided upon, terms will prove to be acceptable for some but offensive to others. It is not my intention, nor that of the Community Advisory Groups to offend anyone. The simple intention was to practice an act of re-cognition (shifting of cognition or thinking) towards decolonizing this work by 'dis-membering' colonial linguistic power and make the terminology more meaningful for those involved.

Further, the reader will also notice revised spelling of English words. Aboriginal scholar, Kathleen Absolon (2011) introduced me to the concept of conjuring up words and using English words in atypical new ways to help the reader view though a different lens suggesting an image and meaning different than that of the original use. For example, Absolon uses the word 'dis-member' to evoke meaning of a forced disconnection. Other examples include 're-search,' - different from the Western meaning that holds a lot of colonial baggage. Re-search is to search again from our own location, using our own ways (Absolon, 2011, p. 21) or to re-member - to remember not only cognitively, but to re-member physically, mentally, spiritually, and socially. The shifting of the spelling of commonly used words is meant to challenge us to become aware of things from a different lens. This ultimately creates space and opportunity to shift our understanding, perspective and being in the world. Yes, language is that powerful, and with it comes much response-ability. It is our intention to bring this to light

and in so doing, inspire critical reflection on every day words and language, find new options towards decolonizing, writing and mobilizing options for expression.

Further to this, there are different terms throughout this document that you may not be familiar with. To help pull some of these key terms together, Table One provides a snap shot of terms linked to this research along with a brief description of its meaning and reference sources that you can use on your own journey of learning.

Table One:
Glossary of Terms

Term	Brief Description	Reference Sources
Indigenous Research Paradigm	• Made up of Indigenous ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology • Rooted in Indigenous worldviews • Indigenous methodologies disrupt Western methodological status quo in research	• Anderson (1997) • Wilson (2008) • Absolon (2011) • Kovach (2009) • Hart, 2010 • Smith (1999) • Lambert (2014) • Kuokkanen (2007)
Collaborative Participatory Re-Search	• About praxis, a merging of theory and practice. It is about producing useful knowledge through both process and content	• Kirby, Greaves, and Reid (2006)
Perspectivism	• Suggests that there are many ways of viewing a phenomenon • There is no 'best' perspective but many different ways of viewing • Perspective influences how one views and understands the world. Everyone views the world from a different place, giving everyone a different perspective	• Folger, Poole, and Stutman (2001)
Indigenous Feminism	• A perspective to consider responsibilities rather than rights as a primary focus of reclaiming power • Considers gender justice at core of colonial and decolonization analysis	• Anderson (2010) • Suzack, Huhndorf, Perreault, & Barman (2010) • Green (2017)
Two-Eyed Seeing	• To see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing, and to see from the other	• Iwama, Marshall, Marshall & Bartlett (2009)

	eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing, and to use both of these eyes together • Recognized by one of Canada's major health research funders as a starting point for bringing together the strengths of Indigenous and Western ways of knowing	• Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall (2012) • Hall, Dell, Fornssler, Hopkins, Mushquash, and Rowan (2015)
Cultural Learner	• A researcher who works with Indigenous Peoples within a cultural context with little or no knowledge of that culture is viewed as a learner • Entering a learner-teacher relationship takes time, engagement and practice of various cultural protocols before teaching and learning can fully occur	• Archibald (2008)
Ethical Space	• Creating a barrier and allegiance free space where human-to-human dialogue can occur • Requires dialogue about intentions, values, and assumptions to help open new ways of thinking and understanding	• Poole (1972) • Bartlett, Marshall, Marshall, & Iwama (2010) • Ermine, Sinclair, & Jeffrey (2004)
Kitchen Table Discussions	• Small, informal meetings that take place in safe and non-judgmental locations • Can be used as an informal engagement process or as a relationship building process • The aim is to support knowledge exchange through story telling • Linked to 'story-research' that Jo Ann Archibald talks about in creating process that enables people to sit together and talk meaningfully about how their Indigenous knowledge could be effectively used for education and for living a good life and to think about possibilities for overcoming problems experienced in their communities. It is a journey of learning.	• Francis-Jennings & Wolfe (*strataffect.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Kitchen-Table-Article.pdf)* • Archibald (2008)

Locating Self

> It is our opinion that one of the most fundamental principles of Aboriginal research methodology is the necessity for the researcher to locate himself or herself. Identifying, at the outset, the location from which the voice of the researcher emanates.
> *Absolon & Willet, 2009, p. 97*

With a conscious effort to privilege and practice an Indigenous method of contextualizing knowledge, it is important to introduce the reader to the author of this written work. This type of method is contrary to mainstream academic approaches: Monture-Angus (1995) explains the typical approach is for authors not to identify their voices because knowledge is considered to be outside the self where the individual is not actively involved nor is a central part of the knowledge. Feminist academics also take an active role in challenging the objectification of knowledge and encourage the identification of self. Swigonski (1993), for example, writes about Feminist Standpoint Theory as an approach that places the life experiences of marginalized groups at the center of the research project. Further to this, an attempt was made to root this work in an Indigenous paradigm that also holds a centering belief that *who I am influences my perspectives and approach to this work (*Anderson, 1997).

Perspectivism suggests that there are many ways of viewing a phenomenon with many angles that offer promise of different views; however, perspectivism also suggests that we can know no fact without interpretation, nor hold any claim of reality independent of belief (Folger, Poole, and Stutman, 2001). As such, the authors suggest a number of considerations that inform perspective. The first such consideration is that people rely on a catalog of assumptions when viewing a phenomenon. Likewise,

theories and perspectives guide choices while final decisions are left largely to a person's discretion. Finally, the assumptions that are privileged and preferred form perspective and ultimately impact the lens through conflict and practice are viewed. With this in mind, it's important for you to know some things about me that ultimately influence my perspective and thereby the writing of this work.

Although my interest is in Indigenous Methodology, I do not identify as being Aboriginal; nor am I French, Irish, Welsh, or English. Based on family stories, my ancestry is an eclectic combination of each; pieces of all, but not entirely any. I have never felt as though I 'belong' to a cultural group that naturally provides an unquestionable connection or 'fit.' In all honesty, I continually struggle to find my locational grounding and often feel a sense of dis-location, fragmentation, and live somewhere in a muddled middle. What is concrete for me is the fact that I am a middle-class woman who lives with skin-colour privilege (McIntosh, 1998) and complicated inside/outside connections (LaRocque, 2010; Smith, 1999). My children, Josie (11/2000) and Wil (06/2002) are blond-haired, green- and brown-eyed kids with First Nation Status through Paul's (my partner's) membership with Lake Helen First Nation (Red Rock Indian Band). It is nourishing their relational connection to culture, healthy Anishinaabe identity, and pride that motivates me to walk this journey as a settler, cultural learner, and learning practitioner.

I am the accumulation of all that I have experienced and come to know. Thankfully, I have a contrary mind that never 'fit' well within the school system, although it's only later in life I began to see this as a gift instead of the curse I thought it was because of how hard it made navigating the school system growing up. With the help

and support from Elders, I have now come to recognize it as a gift because it helps me question the world around me from an alternative vantage point, from a different perspective than others. I am also thankful to have been raised in a small rural community and family that embodied and practiced values of communitism[6], respect, responsibility, reciprocity, strong spiritual beliefs, and respect for the water and land around us.

For most of my life, I have been working and living as a community helper (supporting when and how I can) in different Indigenous communities, women's organizations, and groups. This has created opportunity to become what Archibald (2008) terms a 'cultural learner' walking with many patient and forgiving Indigenous Peoples, leaders, Grandmothers, Elders, and scholars. This has shown me the value and importance of different ways of knowing and being that seem contrary to the educationally reinforced colonial thinking and ways of being in mainstream society. These life experiences have been my greatest education, forever influencing who I am and how I do what I do. As Simpson (2011) explains:

> Indigenous thought can only be learned through the personal; this is because our greatest influence is on ourselves, and because living in the good way is an incredible disruption of the colonial meta-narrative in and of itself. In a system requiring presence, the only way to learn is to live and demonstrate those teachings through a personal embodiment of *mino bimaadiziwin*[7] (P. 41-42).

[6] Weaver (1997;2001) explains "Communitism is the sense of community tied together by familial relations and the families commitment to it, where family is understood broadly and multi-generationally" (as in Hart, 2010 , p.3 & 2014, p. 154)

[7] Simpson (2011) explains *mino bimaadiziwin* is a phrase that is used to denote 'living the good life' or 'the art of living a good life'. She further explains 'there are many ways to live the good life and that within Nishaabeg contexts, there is no dichotomy between the 'good life' and the 'bad life,' rather living in a good way is an ongoing process" (p. 27).

For more than half my life, I have had the honour and opportunity to learn and live as a cultural learner of Indigenous teachings and ways of being. The two realities leave me feeling like what Reyes Cruz (2012) refers to as a 'reluctant academic' living in a space of not only contradiction and contestation, but also confusion.

Many years ago, I sat in a large circle with Aboriginal Family Support Workers from Friendship Centres across Ontario and a Grandmother Elder asked the question, "Why are you here?" When it was my turn to speak, all I could do was cry. No words could come, just tears. This was a 'defining moment' in my life, leading me on an eye-opening journey that no textbook or lecture could ever come close to providing. As American Educator, William F. Pinar wrote:

> We are what we know. We are, however, also what we do not know. If what we know about ourselves – our history, our culture, our national identity – is deformed by absences, denials and incompleteness, then our identity – both as individuals and as Americans [or as Canadians] – is fragmented (As cited in Christian & Freeman, 2010, p. 384).

I am, in no uncertain terms, a fragmented reluctant academic that wants to better understand why I am here and what purpose or role I have.

As I cautiously don the label of an academic re-searcher, and knowing that writing is a privilege within itself (Ackerly, 2008), I am mindful of my response-ability as a settler to acknowledge, learn, and actively respond to the true Canadian historical legacy of settler colonialism and intergenerational trauma rooted in a Western-based perspective that legitimizes systemic knowledge, power, and privilege. As a member of settler society, I carry a response-ability to actively respond and work on 'unsettling the settler within' (Regan, 2010) in an attempt to support the resurgence of balance and just peace. As Barker (2010) explains:

> The Settler that chooses a decolonizing existence must adjust to new and challenging realities. First, and most importantly, there must be an understanding that Settler people, including those who reject colonial society and culture, may continue to benefit from that society and culture at many levels. There must further be an understanding that, in order to restore a measure of balance to the inevitable power relationships and imbalances in society, Settler people must be willing to take the power that has been granted to them by virtue of their 'membership' in Settler society and put it at the disposal of those whose power has been violently co-opted or stolen (p. 322-324).

As part of my response-ability, it's also important to be mindful and acknowledge my sensitivity and awareness of ensuring that this work, or anything I do, does not engage in cultural appropriation which Stowe (2014) describes as "taking something as one's own and thereby adopting elements from one culture into another without any consideration of the importance of the original cultural context" (p. 2). Indigenous teachings or ways of being are not my experiences or knowledge to share. The only perspective I hold to share are my own experiences as a cultural learner committed to two-eyed seeing.

I may not know for sure 'why I'm here,' but as Kirby, Greaves, and Read (2006) suggest, "we express and represent elements of ourselves in every research situation" (p. 36) and all research, declared or not, reflects a point of view (perspective). I do know I am here with a good heart. This work comes from all of who I am, who I am not, and from within complicated inside/outside connections as described by Smith (1999). This work is the result of a combination of experiences, such as cultural learning; the advantages of privilege through colonization; and strong values of respect, reciprocity, communitism, and a deep connection with land and spirit given to me by my family.

On a more personal side, it also comes from a desire to better understand key elements needed when people from different sectors and communities who share a

space, or need to share a space along a path come to understand how to talk and walk together in an ethical, respectful, and productive way (as per Bartlett, Marshall, Marshall, & Iwama, 2012). I believe this awareness can influence and mobilize transformative change to create a more peace-full future and *mino bimaadiziwin* for all, but, more specifically, for my children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, and all my relations.

Getting Started in a Good Way

Now that we've had a bit of an 'orientation' to who I am as the lead re-searcher and writer of this work, it's time to get this journey started. As previously mentioned, I have really struggled with finding the best way to put this re-search together within a format that honours the process the search embodied, yet meets the needs of the academy as partial requirement to fulfill a Master's degree and, more importantly, provides something useful for community (more specifically for those who contributed to its creation). Throughout history, non-Indigenous settler voice has predominately had the power to define the issues, frame discussions, and provide the perspectives that shape how the world is described and understood (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005). For the most part, Indigenous voices have been excluded from the dominant narrative and often struggled to have their depictions recognized as valued (Harvard, 2011).

We will discuss this more, but before we move any further, I return to the voices of the many Grandmothers, Elders, and Traditional Teachers who have informed my life with their knowledge, guidance, and wisdom re-membering the words of the International Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers Group: "First we pray, then we take action': The prayers and teachings of the ancestors will light our way through an uncertain future" (See Schaefer, 2006, p. 208).

With this, I offer this prayer[8]:

[8] If this prayer does not make sense to you, I welcome you to take a few moments to offer your own prayer at this point, or, skip this piece all together. There is no right or wrong, nor is there judgement. This is only the way that makes sense to me, and honours the way of doing that guided this journey

Grandmothers, Grandfathers, Spirit Helpers, Creator, and Great Universe;

I pray to you with a good heart humbly seeking and inviting your all-knowing wisdom, your directed guidance, and your loving patience as I embark on a journey of learning through what I must call research.

I pray for the courage to challenge who I am in order to transform and re-invent who I am meant to become.

I pray for your guidance to ensure this journey of learning is done in a good way with those who are meant to be readers, collaborative partners, and co-researchers in helping to create a ripple of good things to follow in whatever way that is meant to be.

To All My Relations[9]*, this I pray.*

[9] "In Anishinabe gatherings the term 'All My Relations" is used to honour a concept of family that does not stop with living blood relatives but includes ancestors, the generations to come, and a whole host of 'spirit beings' that inhabit another realm, all of whom play various essential roles not only in sustaining life on Mother Earth but in facilitating our spiritual development – collective and individual" (Amadahy & Lawrence, 2009, p. 116).

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Chapter One: Introduction

A period of change is beginning, that if sustained by the will of the people, will forever realign the shared history of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples in Canada.
Honourable Justice Murry Sinclair
Chair of the TRC of Canada
Official Release of the Truth and Reconciliation Final Report, December 15, 2015

Let me say once again: I give you my word that we will renew and respect that relationship. We will remember that reconciliation is not an Aboriginal issue, it is a Canadian issue.
Prime Minister Justin Trudeau
Official Release of the TRC of Canada
Final Report, December 15, 2015

Introduction

On December 15, 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada presented its final report on the history and legacy of Canada's residential school system in Ottawa. A summary report was released in June 2015 with 94 actionable recommendations calling for changes to policies and programs. Senator[10] Murray Sinclair believes that the release of the TRC final report "marks the beginning of a new chapter in relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians" (Mas, 2015). Although many of the recommendations are addressed to government, Sinclair believes that the calls to action are also aimed at Canadian society in general as it will take the entire nation to do this work.

[10] Murray Sinclair was sworn in as Senator in April, 2016 prior to which he acted as Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

Informed by more than 6,000 powerful and heartbreaking testimonials from residential school survivors who courageously told their stories, the truth of the TRC report (2015) is painful. Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Carolyn Bennett, reported that “in some ways we have barely begun the work of reconciliation because the truth is very painful and therefore it will take a lot of healing and political will, goodwill – everything, all of our energies to effect the change in the relationship necessary for true reconciliation” (Kennedy, 2015, p.1).

The colonial relationship within Canada is unique from many other countries around the world where the colonizer leaves marking the beginning of a post-colonial reality (Green, 1995). The year 2017 will mark the 150th anniversary of Canada’s Confederation. It would seem to be a safe assumption that settlers are here to stay. As such, for a post-colonial relationship to be possible, Senator Sinclair and others (LaRocque, 2010) believe the task of deconstructing and reconstructing must be shared by all Canadians, by all intellectuals, by Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, and on all levels, including at the levels of the individual, family, community, institution, and state (Lane Jr., Bopp, & Norris, 2005). Parry (1997) further emphasizes the intersection of our collective necessity to change and timing:

> The potential for conscious positive change is present and alive in everyone of us. For most, it lies asleep beneath the years of conditioning to ‘mind your own business’; ‘don’t rock the boat’, and ‘you can’t change anything’. Those conditionings are lies which we use to stay asleep or to stay ‘safe’. But the state of our planet tells us that it is no longer safe to sleepwalk through life (Parry, 1997, p. III).

We are, indeed, in a time of history where there is great opportunity, and more importantly, a time of consciousness raising sense of urgency resulting from critical processes like the TRC and increasing community grass-roots movements across

Indigenous communities exemplified by Idle No More. They highlight the need for relational change, transformation, and reconciliation.

It seems more evident than ever, with on-going grassroots efforts becoming more mainstream, as well as considering what's happening around us within the environment - severe weather patterns, wild fires, and devastating oil spills as only a few examples, it's time we wake up. As Parry (1997) suggests, we need to work on becoming more conscious of the world around us, not just from our own perspective, but from the meaning and perspective of others, especially those who have been historically silenced.

Numerous studies and reports have shown that Indigenous women are one of the most marginalized groups in history (Amnesty International report, 2004; McKay, 2005; Native Women's Association of Canada, 2006). The Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (2006) argues that violence against Indigenous women can be traced back to colonization. Before contact, most Indigenous communities were matriarchal, semi-matriarchal or egalitarian, with women holding positions of honour and respect (Anderson, 2000; Wolski, 2009; McKay, 2005). For example, in the area of the Six Nations Confederacy, the Rotinonshonni (translated as 'They Who Built the Extended Longhouse') held the position that "it was up to the women to ensure that the voice of the people was heard" (Rice, 2009, p. 413). It has been asserted that explorers to Canada were shocked to learn about the labour, property ownership, economic, and political authority held by women in their respective societies (Anderson 2000; Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, volume 4, 1996).

The view of the colonists differed drastically from the Indigenous people. For example, the concept of property ownership was much more collective-based in traditional societies as opposed to the Western economic value of private ownership. Consequently, domination of the land and the people occupying it depended on the disempowerment of the Indigenous systems contrary to the colonial power dynamics of the Europeans (Anderson, 2000). Because Indigenous women were strongly linked to the land, and land acquisition became a goal of the colonizers, it can then be argued that Indigenous women became a primary target of negative transgression by means of importing patriarchal ideas and values that ultimately displaced, devalued, and undermined their role within original systems (Wolski 2009, Courchene, 2003).

Despite being a target of such negative transgressions, Indigenous women have continued to resiliently resist. As Krouse and Howard (2009) further explain,

> women's activism has been crucial to building Native communities in cities, not only through their direct participation in political and social movements, but also through their roles behind the scenes, as keepers of tradition, educators of children, and pioneers in city life (Krouse & Howard, 2009, p. x).

The authors further argue that Indigenous women's experiences and their relationships in working with non-Indigenous Peoples and organizations can provide insights into power dynamics and colonial inequities providing processes and strategies for moving forward in re-setting the relationships of the past, re-membering a way forward over the next 150 years.

Focus

Qualitative in nature, this participatory-action and collaborative-based study focused on identifying key elements and strategies that could provide insight and tools

for non-Indigenous people interested in sharing space along the path towards more positive de-colonizing relationships while working within Indigenous communities, specifically, with Indigenous women's groups. The primary assumption related to the grounding of this study is that the way forward requires commitment to transcend settler colonialism as *people*, and to work together as *Peoples* to reclaim Indigenous truth against the lie of colonialism (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005). Indigenous women and trusted decolonizing allies, carry resilient lived experience and cultural orientation. This supports their place as rightful leaders holding the necessary keys to mobilizing transformative change for building a new future over the next 150 years.

Conceptual Framework

> The starting point within Indigenous theoretical frameworks is different than from within western theories: the spiritual world is alive and influencing; colonialism is contested; and storytelling, or 'narrative imagination,' is a tool to vision other existences outside of the current ones by critiquing and analysing the current state of affairs, but also by dreaming and visioning other realities.
> *Simpson, 2011, p. 40*

An underlying component of this work has been the belief that process is far more important than outcome. I have read about, experienced, and witnessed the damage research has had on many Peoples, families, and communities. As I humbly and carefully set out to walk down this path, the well-known saying continuously rings in my mind: "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." I by no means intend to continue fuelling potentially negative impacts in the name of research, but how will I know? Is it even possible if this work is (1) centered within the structures, requirements

and systems of the Western-based academy, and (2) the lead researcher does not identifying as Indigenous.

As Kovach (2009) explains, conceptual frameworks make visible the way a person sees the world, whether they be transparent or not, they are always there. With this said, after much reflection, what 'fits' the best with who I am and my life experiences is an Indigenous Paradigm. Wilson (2008) explains that an Indigenous research paradigm "is made up of an Indigenous ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology" (p. 13) which influence the tools researchers use in their searching. Strega (2005) defines epistemology as "a philosophy of what counts as knowledge and 'truth'; it is a strategy by which beliefs are justified. Epistemologies are theories of knowledge that answer questions about who can be a 'knower'; what tests beliefs and information must pass in order to be given the status of 'knowledge'; what kinds of things can be known" (p. 201). Strega further explains that ontology is like a worldview, that is, a theory about what the world is like. Olsen, Lodwick & Dunlap (1992) have described the concept of worldviews as mental lenses for perceiving the world. Or, as Hart (2010) describes, worldviews "are cognitive, perceptual, and affective maps that people continuously use to make sense of the social landscape and to find their ways to whatever goals they seek" (p. 2).

Leanne Simpson (2000) outlines seven common principles of Indigenous worldviews:

1. Knowledge is holistic, cyclic, and dependent upon relationships and connections to living and non-living beings and entities
2. There are many truths, and these truths are dependent upon individual experiences
3. Everything is alive
4. All things are equal

5. The land is sacred
6. The relationship between people and the spiritual world is important
7. Human beings are least important in the world (As cited in Hart, 2010, p. 3)

Graham (2002) relates this to a 'relational worldview' where the emphasis is on spirit, spirituality, and a sense of communitism and respectful individualism. Weaver (1997; 2001) further explains communitism as "the sense of community tied together by familial relations and the families' commitment to it" (As cited in Hart, 2010, p. 3). Similarly, respectful individualism is different from self-interest in that the needs of community are taken into consideration and acted on over personal interest or gain (Hart, 2010). Wilson (2008) further states that this relational way of being is at the heart of what it means to be Indigenous: "rather than viewing ourselves as being *in* relationship with other people or things, we *are* the relationships that we hold and are part of" (p. 80).

As I said earlier, 'the road to hell is paved with good intentions.' I, by no means, intend to contribute to the perpetuation of violence, injustice, and practice of colonial oppression, but how would I know the difference? It is not a matter of 'if' my colonial programming will raise to the surface in something I say, write, or do, it's a matter of 'when.'

To proactively attempt to ensure checks and balances, a collaborative alliance was formed with an advising Community Group of Indigenous women. This was a critical necessity for this search to ensure the journey was grounded in an Indigenous research paradigm. As Wilson (2008) puts it, Indigenous ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology are at the core. The aim was not to engage in what Smith (1999) calls an "inversion of power relations" (p. 26), but to raise consciousness by privileging a vantage point that has been traditionally silenced within academia. This

can be achieved through the eyes and voice of Indigenous women on colonial-influenced realities experienced by Indigenous women. Only by challenging the cultural outlook of mainstream society will non-Indigenous Peoples begin to understand Indigenous issues, cultures, and values (Wilson, 2008).

In summary, the conceptual framework for this work is rooted in an Indigenous research paradigm made up of Indigenous ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology. The Community Advisory Group of Indigenous women has been informing the conceptual framework of this re-search from the beginning of the project to help build the design of the re-search, ensure the work remained respectful of Indigenous context and protocol, and that the outcome of the work honoured reciprocity by ensuring it had something of value for the community in the end.

Research Design

> The research path begins with the central home of the research, the community, the Place. This includes building relationships with members of the community as well as having respect for that community, and learning about the people in that community and what their culture is like. It begins with an ethnographic point of view of living and working in the community
>
> *Lambert, 2014, p. 38*

This work grows from seeds planted long before the necessity of this project. The first inspirational seed is linked to my experience as co-facilitator of a program entitled Moon Voices: Aboriginal Women Reclaiming Our Power (Moon Voices) offered through an Indigenous-centered non-profit urban-based agency, Ka Ni Kanichihk. The second inspirational seed is linked to the continued connection that started in and grew from the Moon Voices program with a unified commitment to ongoing collective learning through

experiencing. Moon Voices was a program that supported collaborative connections and provided space and opportunity for what Smith (2009) refers to as an Indigenous agenda focused on self-determination (reclaiming power) with processes including decolonization, healing, transformation, and mobilization. Moon Voices created space and opportunity for Indigenous women to gather in safety to learn, share, heal, and transform. Many women who were involved at different points throughout the Moon Voices program reportedly remain connected long after the funding and program ended.

Hoping to maintain connection, a small group of women (once linked with Moon Voices) initially met to discuss the possibility of a collaborative effort that would become the foundation for this thesis work, and, more importantly, a useful resource for community on the topic. For the most part, the participating members of this initial group meeting eventually evolved into a “Community Advisory Group” that helped to shape and guide this re-search. The process has been stretched over a long period of time as a result of my moving from Winnipeg to Northwestern Ontario, health issues, and various other life events. Despite these changes, what has not waivered is the commitment to honour our relationships and complete this work with the Community Advisory Group in a good way. Some members of the Community Advisory Group have had different levels of involvement based on time, availability, and circumstances, but all have and will remain contributing members of the group.

With the seeds and focus of this work rooted within, and guided by pre-existing relations, the rational epistemology at the center of this work is relationality, and the belief that, “we could not be without being in relationship with everything that surrounds us and is within us. Our reality, our ontology, is relationships” (Kovach, 2009, p. 76).

With the participation of an Indigenous Community Advisory Group and non-Indigenous researcher, the work of this project was not only for the research, but also for an opportunity to learn from each other as we shared space along the path. Our relationships are not only with each other, but with the ideas within the topic facilitated by mutual learning.

Boyd (2005) poses the question, “What knowledge do you privilege?” (As cited in Wilson, 2008, p. 75). The essence of the question seeks to unmask the personal choice of epistemology and the politics of knowledge. It has been the intention of this work to privilege Indigenous women’s voices, experiences, and knowledge. The settler colonial process of systematically dismantling (or dis-membering) original Indigenous philosophies, practices, and systems that upheld Indigenous women’s status and womenhood has taken place at different times for different Peoples over the last five hundred years (Anderson, 2000). Indigenous societies have been infiltrated with imposed patriarchal models of social organization consistent with ‘national security’ (in the process of nation building) that have been violently destroying traditional forms of social relationships and cultural values fundamental in the making of a people’s identity (as cited in Jeong, 2000, p. 206). With a long history of European men setting standards and systems on how Indigenous societies were controlled, dominated, and considered ‘civilized,’ practices of patriarchy have been unconsciously adopted into contemporary Canadian society over time. This has normalized a multi-generational history and culture of violence that directly impacts Indigenous women. The Native Women’s Association of Canada (2010) argues, “the overrepresentation of Indigenous women in

Canada as victims of violence must be understood in the context of a colonial strategy that sought to dehumanize Aboriginal women" (p. 1).

When making a conscious intention to privilege Indigenous women's voices, it is important to acknowledge three major points. First, it is not possible to separate the Aboriginal and the woman (McKay, 2005; Anderson, 2009). Non-Aboriginal women also suffer from the male-dominance of patriarchy; however, Aboriginal women are further marginalized due to their cultural association. As the United Nations (2012) has reported "Indigenous women and girls face multiple forms of discrimination associated especially with their indigenous identity, their gender, culture, religion and language" (p. 18-20). Second, the shared common Aboriginal history within Canada is a history of racism, oppression, genocide, and ethnocide (Anderson, 2009) that ultimately supports inequality and unfair treatment at personal and collective levels. Third, from different vantage points, the patriarchal nature of the state has different meanings and consequences. Thus, understanding how patriarchy operates in Canada without understanding colonization is problematic at best (Monture-Angus, 1995).

As alluded to earlier, colonization is not simply a strategy of the past, but a reality that reinforces the silence and indifference surrounding the violence experienced by Indigenous women today. It is, Native Women's Association of Canada argues, "the ongoing narration of violence, systemic racism and discrimination, purposeful denial of culture, language, traditions and legislation designed to destroy identity that has led to the realities facing Aboriginal Peoples" (2010, p. 1). If there is something more shocking

than the violence itself, it is the silence within which the violence is allowed to continue. Fry (2011) further explains:

> It is the silence which is perhaps the greatest shame of all. It is the silence of those of us in the majority who chose to turn a blind eye to this violence – cases of missing Aboriginal daughters and mothers which never make the headlines; epidemics of suicide which don't elicit an outpouring of concern and outrage from the non-Aboriginal community. It is the silence which is complicit in allowing the situation to continue. It is this silence which sends the message that we don't care, that we don't want to care, that we won't pull all the stops to say 'enough' (p. 4).

It is time to break the silence and support the creation of space and opportunity for Indigenous women's voices to be heard and re-claim their rightfully inherent power and roles of leadership within society.

Kovach (2009) expresses that researchers wanting to work within an Indigenous research paradigm must ask themselves six key questions to help orientate their search. Table Two (below) offers a snap shot of the questions posed by Kovach (2009) along with correlating highlights of the relational connection and linkages considered in the development of this re-search design. Presenting this information in such a way, other than sentences and paragraphs, is an attempt to exemplify and emphasize the importance that, everyone sees, understands and/or relates to things in different ways. The questions helped map out a path while ensuring there was a necessary focus on how the journey would evolve opposed to solely focusing on the outcome and final product of the search. This in turn reemphasizes Wilson's claim (2008) "relationships do not merely shape reality, they *are* reality" (p. 7).

Table Two: Snapshot of Aligning Work with an Indigenous Research Paradigm

Question	Link
How do the methods help to build respectful relationships between the topic being studied and myself as a researcher (on multiple levels)?	Pre-existing relationships with Community Advisory Group and the Community Collaborators who participated in sharing their knowledge which provided a foundation of respect to work from. Fletcher, Lola, Letendre, Ruttan, Worrell, Letendre, & Schramm (2011) found that in community-based research "from a community's perspective, without relationships you cannot ethically begin or sustain research community" (p. 338). Privilege and practice cultural worldviews and ways of being. Grandmothers involved in sharing, providing guidance and support. The 'process' was prioritized over the outcome; how this re-search was conducted from beginning to end was a decolonizing praxis of the co-learning. Community Advisory Group provided ongoing guidance, advice, input and support throughout. The learning will be shared with community and potentially further inform Peoples understanding and daily and/or collaborative praxis.
How do the methods help to build respectful relationships between researcher and the research participants?	Cultural Protocol and Reciprocity – the contributions of the Community Collaborators where recognized and offered tobacco and a small symbolic gift. Assumption that by working tougher, people can change the way issues are addressed. Like a tide that lifts all boats, conversation has the potential to enable real and lasting change (Born, 2012). The Kitchen Table Discussions (interviews) created safe space for conversation and dialogue that supported a flow of meaning between/among participants (Born, 2012)
How can the researcher relate respectfully to the other participants involved in this research? Together we can form a stronger relationship with the ideas that we will share.	Through storytelling, sharing food and connecting through reflective engaging discussion in hopes to better understand relational meaning and connection with sharing and new learning. From a position of 'cultural learner' and reflective practitioner. Incorporate learning into regular praxis and ways of being.
What is my role as a researcher in this relationship, and what are my responsibilities?	Pre-existing relationships. Participant observer/listener. Ethical and relational accountability. Humility.
Am I being responsible in fulfilling my role/obligations to the other participants, to the topic and to all of my relations?	Community Advisory Group meetings to review and dialogue developments to date, data collection and outcomes. Understanding that everything is attached to a contextual meaning, process must suspend opinion and engage in other participants meaning (Born,2012) Open communication and sharing of information collected.
What am I contributing or giving back to the relationship? Is the sharing, growth and learning that is taking place precipice?	The creation of a Guidebook based on the learning from the thesis work for settlers interested in learning how to share space within collaborative work alliances with Indigenous Peoples. Writing shared with all involved with an invitation to provide thoughts and feedback.

Overview of Thesis

In Chapter 2, the literature review discusses how the legacy of colonization has created a culture of violence that intentionally targeted Indigenous womanhood. It will illustrate that although remaining one of the most marginalized groups in Canada, Indigenous women and their trusted allies, are, and will continue to be, leaders in creating a shift from violence to harmony. In chapter 3, I describe the followed path outlining the re-search methodology and overview of the search process. Chapter 4 highlights the sense making process and the learning that was gathered along the data collection portion of our path. Chapter 5 focuses on highlighting practical strategies and tools to help inform relational collaborative praxis when others wish to collaborate and '*walk with me: sharing space on the path'*. The focus of Chapter 6 is to acknowledge our walk together and to close our journey together in a good way.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations related to this search. First and foremost, as I have acknowledged, I am a settler attempting to ground this work in an Indigenous paradigm. To reflect on whether my use of Indigenous methodology as a non-Indigenous person has a situational appropriateness I referred to questions posed by Absolon (2011): "Do you have Indigenous worldview, history and experiences? Can you position your process in an Indigenous worldview and framework?" (p. 162). She further explains:

> Indigenous methodologies require situational appropriateness, which means that they can only be actualized when the whole context is relevant (Absolon, 2011, p.162).

Regardless of my whole-hearted attempts to ensuring the work is centered within Indigenous context and Indigenous women's voices are insight are privileged, it does not replace or excuse the ultimate truth. I am still a settler. There is no justified alibi to change this fact.

In relation to time, distance, connectedness and focus, one limitation was a major life move whereby my family and I relocated to a community in Northwestern Ontario, the Robinson Superior Treaty Area. This was a move that we, as a family, consciously made as the opportunity to raise our children in their Treaty Area, to reconnect to family, the land, and way of life that we had been longing for while living in the city. Although this was a positive move for our family, it did 'interrupt' the flow of this work as it had to be put aside while the adjustments of relocation and learning of a new job took priority. This distanced me not only from the participants, but also from dedicated time available to focus on moving the project forward. This made connecting with participants challenging as it required traveling nine hours each direction to connect with everyone for interviews.

I did try to connect via Skype with one kitchen table group, but the technology did not work well[11], and we all decided to forego the session until I was able to meet with them in person. This also contributed to one of my greatest learnings as a re-searcher: the importance of having an existing relational connection with my re-search group, and how disconnecting it feels to engage in knowledge exchange through technology rather than in person. This also imposed a limitation of how many people I was able to

[11] Although the advancements of technology provide helpful means of connecting with rural and remote communities, it will never replace or come close to being of the same quality of in-person connection or care. Although there is a virtual connectivity and people can visibly see each other, the connective synergy is distanced and easily fragmented or de-personalized for all involved.

interview and include within this work. The time lag added a challenge for some people with regards to the demands and pressures on their schedules and life circumstances thereby limiting their availability to remain engaged throughout this entire journey. As Power and Kuhnlein (2008) added in *Collaborative Research: an Indigenous lens perspective,* "time costs are also an important consideration, particularly given the high time demands often placed on researchers: Additional time is often associated with travel, the establishment of a collaborative relationship and the joint preparation of research material and results for dissemination" (p. 2). This project has certainly been no exception.

Significance of the Work

Working within Indigenous community and organizations as a settler and cultural learner over the last 21 years, I have had the honour to learn from, and with, Indigenous women while sharing space along the different paths we travel. One of the lessons I've learned from the many stories of resilience and reclamation of power, is that despite the inter-generational impacts of colonization, the seeds required to influence transformative change in addressing violence against Indigenous women lie with Indigenous knowledge that supports a peaceful way of living through praxis, reflection and action upon the world (Friere, 2010).

Government programs and legislation have tried to address the shameful rates of violence; but their attempts come from the same worldview and values that have led to the very reality we find ourselves. As evident with the ever increasing Indigenous-led actions of mobilization, it's time for change: it's time to challenge what has become the

Canadian status quo. As such, it's also time for settlers to shift our consciousness and also become active agents for different change by understanding our benefit of, and challenging, the Canadian status quo that's been built on principles of settler colonialism and perpetuation of systemically violent systems and structures that continue to impact lives each day. We need to humbly open our minds and hearts to the voices that hold the key to unlocking the colonial prison of the Canadian state. This will allow us to become strong allies in the possibility of liberation and resurgence for Indigenous women, families and communities. In relation to the contribution to the peace field, this re-search project provides an example of a 'decolonizing praxis' towards building peace informed by Indigenous women's knowledge, lived experience, voice, and trusted allies through discovering decolonizing collaborative alliances. The learning outcomes provide key elements and strategies that provide insight and tools for non-Indigenous people interested in working with Indigenous communities in learning how to share space along a path forward that will best support relationships needed to create a new future over the next 150 years.

Summary

The intention of the opening words and Chapter One was to help create an orientation, context and focus for the path ahead. I intended to help create a space and opportunity for you, the reader, and myself as the writer to connect as we share space along this path. Fletcher, Baydala, Letendre, Ruttan, Worrel, Letendre, and Schramm (2011) explain that:

> Research is not just a scientific activity; it is understood by many Indigenous people to occur in the context of relationships past, present,

> and future. This includes harm experienced as a result of past research engagement, increasing self-determination and current research, and the expectation of benefit for future generations (p. 342).

Before it is possible to start jumping into the findings of this search, although very insightful and powerful within themselves, it's necessary to spend some time along this path looking at the past to help create a glimpse into how we are where we are today. Chapter Two provides a literature review that touches on the impacts of colonization while discussing the strong roots of Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

> Before the arrival of the Europeans,
> Aboriginal Peoples had their own laws and
> customary practices for maintaining peace and
> stability within their communities.
> *Hamilton and Sinclair, 1991, p. 54*

Introduction

Miller (2011) explains that majority of the non-European world, including Canada, was colonized under the international law that is known as the Doctrine of Discovery. Under this legal principle, European countries claimed superior rights over Indigenous Nations thereby informing one of Canada's predominant foundational narratives in which the held belief is that explorers arrived from Europe to 'empty land' that could be claimed and used for their own purposes with no acknowledgement or recognition of the tribes that populated the space prior to arrival. Although initially valued for their skills and knowledge for survival, the balance of power eventually began to shift as more settlers arrived and the construction of a white settler society progressed (Saul, 2015). As Justice (now Senator) Murray Sinclair explained in an interview with CBC Chief Correspondent Peter Mansbridge June 1, 2015[12] the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, since Confederation, has been one in which the government of Canada has deliberately attempted to extinguish the cultures and languages of Aboriginal people through means such as, but not limited to, residential schools and legislation. The long lasting and devastating impacts of colonization and cultural eradication of First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities over the last 150 years has been well documented (Eguchi, Riley, Nelson, Adonri, & Trotter, 2016).

[12] To view the interview go to (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Vc1PcIDV_I),

All of Canadian society has been called to action through the groundbreaking and historically important work of the TRC. The 94 recommendations itemized by the TRC hold the means to guiding us towards reshaping a new future in which “Aboriginal Peoples take their rightful place in Canada’s history as founding nations who have strong and unique contributions to make to this country” (TRC, 2015, p. 251). Despite this clearly laid out path and contextualized need for change, within people’s day-to-day lives, there still remains extreme inequity and imbalance of power. Considered in relation to uncertainty and confusion as to how or where to start re/envisioning a new future, a significant inequitable and relational disconnect between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples leave so many questions. How are settlers to be trusted based on their treatment of, or indifference towards, Indigenous Peoples past and present? As a settler, what is my role in building a new future? How do I ensure I am not simply perpetuating the colonial agenda? How do we respectfully and meaningfully share space along the path into a new future?

I have often heard the saying ‘before you can figure out where you’re going, it’s always best to have an idea of where you’ve come from and where you are now’. The intention of this chapter is to review literature related to how the legacy of colonization has created a culture of violence that intentionally targeted Indigenous womanhood. Although one of the most marginalized groups in Canada, Indigenous women and their trusted allies, are, and will continue to be leaders in the years to come. The topics discussed in this chapter include the legacy of colonization, a culture of violence and the impacts on Indigenous women, the needed shift from violence to harmony, Indigenous Feminism, and finally, the path ahead and people’s response-ability.

This chapter is intended to provide a brief overview of very complex and complicated topics. I also acknowledge that it is written from the perspective of a settler committed to being a cultural learner, albeit, still a student with much yet to learn. It's important to acknowledge that there is a growing number of Indigenous leaders and scholars (Linklater, 2014; Hart, 2002, 2010; Kovach, 2005, 2009; Alfred, 2009a, 2009b; Martin, 2008; Absolon, 2011; Anderson, 2000; Monture-Angus,1995; LaRocque, 2010; Smith, 1999; Simpson, 2008) who write about the varying impacts of settler colonialism from an Indigenous perspective in ways far more in-depth and articulate than I could ever hope to provide. I write this section from the perspective and experience of a settler and encourage you to actively seek out and learn from their perspectives[13] and perspectives. As LaRocque (2010) explains

> Native writers are an extraordinary group of people whose critical, creative, and life writings have, until recently, been ignored or relegated to ethnographic and personal 'narratives', which if read differently, actually contain much anti-colonial theory, or, at least, much theoretical possibility (p. 12).

Seeking out Indigenous scholars, authors, leaders, Elders, and resources provides the opportunity to 'see' from a different perspective than the dominant narrative, which helps to engage with Indigenous meaning. Born (2012) emphasizes that meaning systems shape thinking and beliefs ultimately informed by life experiences and learning. To have any hope of understanding issues beyond our own meaning systems or perspective, it's vital to be open to hearing from people with meaning systems other than our own.

[13] A very helpful resource for settlers reading and willing to expand their awareness and knowledge is www.groundworkforchange.org. The site pulls together a lot of valuable resources and tools in one place.

The Past: The Legacy of Colonization

Prior to contact and imposition of settler colonialism, Indigenous nations of Turtle Island had complex political, social, economic, and cultural structures that emerged from their specific worldviews (Poonwassie & Charter, 2005; Simpson, 2008). The roles of Indigenous women within their cultural beliefs and structures were distinct and diverse, when explorers first arrived on Turtle Island, they were shocked to learn about the labour, property ownership, economic and political authority held by Indigenous women in their respective societies (Anderson 2000; RCAP, 1996). Anderson writes:

> It was not long before they realized that, in order to dominate the land and the people that occupied it, they needed to disempower the women. Indigenous systems that allocated power to women were incompatible with the kind of colonial power dynamics that would be necessary to maintain colonial power. (Anderson, 200, p. 58).

The colonial process of systematic dismantling (or dis-memberment[14]) of original Indigenous philosophies, practices, and systems that upheld Aboriginal women's status and womenhood occurred at different times for different Peoples over the last 150 years (Anderson, 2000, RCAP, 1996, Simpson, 2008). To help frame a discussion around the impacts of colonization, I'd like to refer to the symbolic visual of a Tipi[15]. There are countless teachings linked to a Tipi and I encourage readers to connect with Elders and traditional teachers that carry those teachings. Without sharing specific teachings I have received (as these are not my teachings to share), I will present a few observational points linked to the usage of the tipi as a metaphorical tool for learning. For example,

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[14] Cultural Informant, Albert McLeod of Winnipeg, Manitoba, shared this concept at a workshop held at Ka Ni Kanichik, Inc., on the power and intention of language. Other published authors that speak to the importance and power of language include Lederach (1995) and MacLeod (2009).

[15] I will be using the pictures as both visual illustration and metaphors throughout this work. St. Clair (2000) explains, "The use of metaphors is a particular lens that helps people gain clarity about notions and concepts that are too complex to understand within the confines of academic discourse" (as cited in Michell, 2009, p. 66).

Picture 1: Picture of TRC Tipi from the Exploring the Good Life Summit event held at The Forks, Winnipeg Manitoba September 21 & 22, 2011

there are typically 13 poles that fit together to create the structural framework. Each pole has an individual purpose that contributes to the whole. Once the poles are securely compiled, the frame is then wrapped with a 'skirt' to provide protective covering from the outside elements offering a safe space for people to gather and connect while nurturing a sense of identity and cultural practice/connection.

Watts Walker (As cited in Secretan**,** 1999) argues that culture is composed of five different components: belief systems, day-to-day existence and lifestyle, communication (how people communicate), modes of interaction (how people treat each other), and an orientation to spirituality. The belief systems of Indigenous Peoples, although diverse across the many different Indigenous groups, contain common elements related to sacred connection to land and relational interconnection to all things. These belief systems supported mechanisms and systems that defined day-to-day existence and lifestyle (ways of being) that also helped define roles and responsibilities of all community members within extended family systems reinforcing a sense of commitment to community (the whole) over individualism.

Over time, it's been argued that settler colonialism systematically set out to disrupt and dis-member the pre-existing culture and ways of life one pole at a time. This

included acts such as, but not limited to:

(1) *The Disruption of Beliefs*: Adoption of a doctrine of discovery narrative, for example, assumes an oversight, or unrecognized disempowerment of the Peoples who occupied the lands prior to discovery. Working from this premise also creates justification for enforcement of foreign worldviews. This is a challenge as Euro-centric worldviews rooted in patriarchy, individualism and capitalism over Indigenous values of community and holism. This devaluation of beliefs has been disrupting Indigenous ways of life creating power-over relationships.

(2)*The Disruption of day-to-day Existence and Lifestyle*: Through the process of settler colonialism, many Indigenous Peoples experienced forced dis-location. For example, prime resource rich land that Indigenous Peoples once occupied became 'claimed' for resource development while Indigenous communities were displaced to a reservation system where movement was restricted and monitored through the enforcement of pass permits with Indian Agents acting as the 'gate keepers'. This caused a disruptive impact of Indigenous people's use of traditional land connected with the daily, seasonal and annual cultural practices that supported community sustainability and way of life.

(3) *The Disruption of Language*: Linear and cyclical paradigms ultimately influence language. English is noun-based, lending itself to support more linear thinking and oppositional concepts while Indigenous languages are verb-based and relationally organized (Maryboy, Begay, & Nichol, 2006). Language itself helps provide insight into worldviews, beliefs and values. When unable to

pronounce or understand the language, settlers reinforced the use of English words, pronunciations and meanings reinforcing the use of English through residential schools by punishing children and youth when caught speaking their language. Overtime, many Indigenous languages have been disrupted to the point where they have been, or are at risk of being lost forever (Fontaine, 2002).

(4) *The Disruption of Relationships:* As the different layers of disruption accumulate, the once familiar ways of nurturing and maintaining healthy relationships become disrupted. For example, removal of children to Residential Schools played a significant role in disrupting family relationships resulting in people now living with trauma opposed to experiences of growing up surrounded by loving healthy relational connections.

(5) *The Disruption of Spiritual Practices and Orientation.* Ceremony and cultural celebrations that brought families and communities together became criminalized and punishable if practiced (Robbins & Dewar, 2011). This, like the other disruptions discussed, further impacts the sense of familiar connectedness leading to the dis-memberment of ways of being that once thrived and supported a sense of connectedness.

As each intentional act of disruption occurred, once valued and necessary pieces of culture became dis-membered. This deconstructed the ways of being that once supported and maintained healthy communities, families and individuals.

Let's just pause for a minute and try to gain a vivid visual in our mind's eye. The Tipi offers a symbol of how Indigenous Peoples had a complex and strong culture; The external wrap, or skirt, of the Tipi being the cultural beliefs while the poles symbolize

the systems and structures that create the foundation. As each pole was slowly dis-membered through the enforcement of colonial systems or structures, a layer of trauma was replaced in its absence leading to repercussions of inter-generational dis-connect and trauma that impacts both the individual and collective realities of Indigenous Peoples still felt today. This dis-location and dis-connection disrupted the intergenerational transmission of culture and practice that traditionally occurred within Indigenous communities (Stowe, 2014). Likewise, as each pole was dis-membered, layers of indifference and legitimized validation became entrenched into the belief of ethno-centric knowledge and practice becoming 'status quo' or 'just the way it is'.

Over time, that perpetuation of inter-generational social inequality through cultural violence becomes normalized leading to a sense of helplessness and in many cases, a realignment of worldviews with the dominant culture where the oppressed becomes the oppressor (Freire, 2010) with unquestioned acceptance of the dominant groups privileges. Eurocentrism speaks to the internalization of colonial ideology by Indigenous Peoples. Victor (2007) explains

> To me it seemed as though if we wanted to succeed within a colonial society we had to either claim 'blissful ignorance' or believe certain ideologies to be true. As a result I think many Indigenous people have internalized oppression, eurocentrism and racism which then explains why we may then oppress and discriminate against ourselves. We actually begin to see ourselves as 'other' and dissociate from our Aboriginal identity. We begin to see our own Indigenous culture through the eyes of the colonizers and begin to see it as 'backward', 'inferior', and 'less than' (p. 12).

As Victor (2007) and Freire (2010) suggest, colonization has had devastating impacts over time. Despite the constant attack of colonization, Alfred and Corntassel (2005) contend that the lived collective and individual experiences of Indigenous Peoples yield

the clearest and most useful insights for establishing culturally sound strategies to resist colonialism, regenerate communities and revision a path forward[16].

A Culture of Violence: Impacts on Indigenous Women

Colonization is not simply a strategy of the past, but a contemporary reality that reinforces the silence and indifference surrounding the violence experienced by Indigenous women: “It is the ongoing narration of violence, systemic racism and discrimination, purposeful denial of culture, language, traditions and legislation designed to destroy identity that has led to the realities facing Aboriginal Peoples” (NWAC, 2010, p. 1). An interim report released by the Status of Women Standing Committee of the House of Commons entitled “Call into the Night: An Overview of Violence Against Aboriginal Women” (Fry, 2011) reiterates the current impacts of colonization, that the racism Indigenous people face daily is disturbing with many harmful consequences. One such example is the internalization of racism that influences sense of value, self-worth and identity which, in turn, influences the internalization of a ‘learned helplessness’ grounded in colonized patriarchal systems and language. As a result, Anderson (2000) believes violence has now become a ‘way of life’ for many Indigenous women, crippling their well-being while fueling the cycle of violence. As noted in the report, racism arises not only from a lack of education and training of the general public, but also the policies and legislation enforced throughout time since Confederation.

[16] The Community Advisory Group facilitated a powerful interactive presentation using a Tipi to help create a symbolic visual illustration of the impacts of settler colonialism for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples as part of the 2016 Peace and Conflict Studies Graduate Student Conference held October 21 and 22, 2016 in Winnipeg, MB. A presentation guide was created for community to continue facilitating the presentation as a learning and teaching tool.

With the impacts of the deeply rooted colonial history, and the continuously increasing rates of violence against Indigenous women and girls (Statistics Canada, 2006; Fry, 2011), it can be argued that the 'root cause' of such violence lies within a culture of violence that has emerged within Canada since occupation by settlers. Defined as any aspect of culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form, Galtung (1990) believes cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right – or at least not wrong. Examples of cultural violence include the reinforced shifting of holistic and matriarchal-rooted worldviews to patriarchal individual-capitalist, enforced dislocation from homeland, and the criminalization of spiritual practices and ceremonies[17] to name a few.

To support a targeted attack on culture, structural violence helps to offer 'legitimized' justification for the perpetuation of violence through governing legislation and systems such as the Indian Act and Residential Schools[18]. An indirect form of violence built into social, political and economic structures, structural violence gives rise to unequal power and consequently unequal life chances (Weber, 1999). Weber (1999) suggests that extreme structural violence can ultimately lead to death by denying even the most basic needs such as food and shelter, which were some of the experiences reported throughout the TRC process from courageous residential school survivor's willing to share their stories.

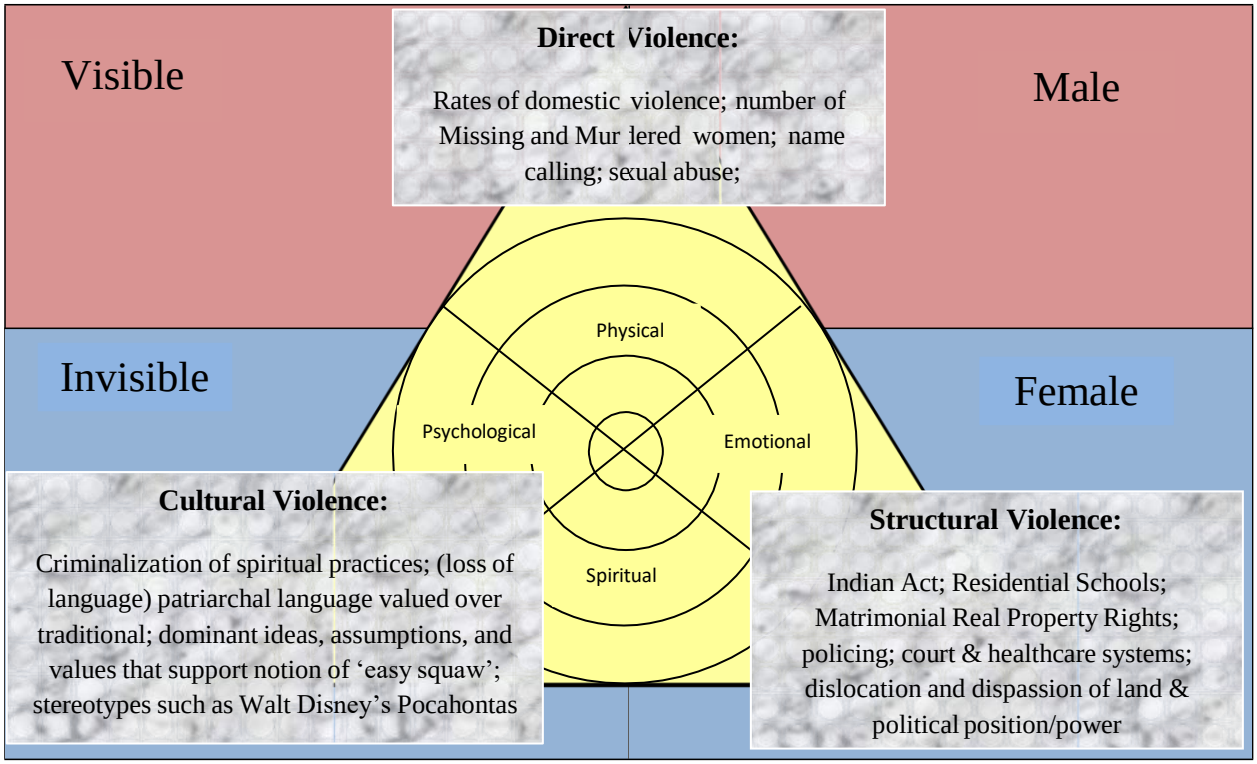
Just as a river is able to smooth even the most jagged rocks over time, cultural and structural violence that has been built and justified over the last 150 years of settler

[17] As mentioned, and worth mentioning, spiritual orientation such as ceremonies, cultural gatherings and traditional knowledge sharing was outlawed and prohibited

[18] This is a thesis topic within itself beyond the scope of this paper. The reader is strongly encouraged to read the Truth and Reconciliation Final Report as well as the work of Indigenous scholars to learn more.

colonialism has slowly become accepted as status quo. To help create a more visual breakdown of this discussion, Figure One has been created referencing an Indigenous holistic belief of a whole person including the physical, emotional, spiritual and

Figure One: Types of Violence that Supports a Culture of Violence



Source: Adapted from Galtung (1990) and Arnold, Burke, James, Martin, & Thomas (1991) utilizing examples facing Indigenous women in Canada, and Indigenous teachings that have been shared with me of the four directions and elements of the Medicine Wheel.

psychological, Galtung's triangle of violence including direct, structural and cultural violence as well as Doris Marshall Institute's Triangle of Oppression (Arnold, Burke, James, Martin, & Thomas, 1991). Within this sense, a person's whole being is directly and indirectly impacted by different means of violence and violent reality. This constant multi-faceted and continuous exposure slowing leads to a sense of indifference (willful

blindness) and eventual justification for the perpetuation of a culture of violence that targets primarily women as a means of advancing the colonial agenda.

To explain the ongoing perpetuation of this dynamic, social reproduction theory provides a lens to understand how settler colonial values, such as patriarchy, have been perpetuated and enforced over time through social construction and language. Reflecting on the work of Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, and Karl Marx, MacLeod (2009) explains some social reproduction theories advocate for more deterministic models while others are more culturally attuned. Figure Two offers a breakdown of the two spectrums.

Figure Two: Social Reproduction Theories, MacLeod (2009)

Deterministic Theories	- starting point from structural requirements of capitalistic economic system - attempts to demonstrate how individuals are obliged to fulfill predefined roles - ensures perpetuation of class society
Culturally Attuned	- begins with experiences of individuals - seeks to understand people on their own terms before attempting to connect experiences with demands of capitalistic social relations

Influenced by the French structuralist movement, Bourdieu (1977) has two main concepts: cultural capital and habitus. Coined as the centerpiece of Bourdieu's theory, cultural capital is defined as "the general cultural background, knowledge, disposition, and skills that are passed from one generation to the next" (As cited in MacLeod, 2009, p. 13). When considering residential school for example, reproduction of the patriarchal dominant power relations was subtly being taught through multiple means including violence (physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, spiritual) and negative based

messaging such as “savage” and “squaw[19]” while dismantling and devaluing traditional beliefs, systems, and practices through academics, legal reinforcement and removal from families and communities.

Bourdieu’s (1977) notion of ‘habitus’ relates to the composition of attitudes, beliefs, and experiences of those inhabiting one’s social world: “This conglomeration of deeply internalize values defines an individual’s attitudes” (As cited in MacLeod, 2009, p. 15). Based on the previous discussion of patriarchy, Aboriginal women’s internalized value, sense of self-worth, and identity continue to be negatively reinforced by a Canadian culture grounded in patriarchal systems and language. As a result, Anderson (2000) believes violence has now become a ‘way of life’ for many Aboriginal women, crippling their well-being while fueling the cycle of violence.

The work of Basil Bernstein and Shirley Brice Heath (As cited in MacLeod, 2009) on linguistic cultural capital also provides important considerations. Simply put, language is a powerful sociological mechanism of social reproduction that Bernstein links to both micro- and macro- issues. MacLeod (2009) explains the basic point is: “the mismatch between the language used at home and the language demanded by the school is a serious stumbling block for working-class and non-white pupils” (p.18). The result: mass human rights violations.

Jeong (2000) suggests that the “root causes of human rights violations originate in not only political oppression but also deteriorating economic and social conditions” (p.

[19] “The portrayal of the squaw is one of the most degraded, most despised and most dehumanized anywhere in the world… she has no human face, she is lustful, immoral, unfeeling and dirty. Such a grotesque dehumanization has rendered all Native women and girls vulnerable to gross physical, psychological and sexual violence”. Emma LaRoque, Department of Native Studies, University of Manitoba, in a presentation to the Manitoba Justice Inquiry (as in Amnesty International No More Stolen Sisters, 2009)

205). Although Canada is one of the world's wealthiest countries, the living conditions of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people in Canada are often compared to those in some of the most impoverished countries around the world (Amnesty International, 2009).

Amnesty International (2009) reports the following as a sobering reality of the current state of affairs in relation to the issue of the violation of human rights facing Aboriginal women and the government's response:

> The Canadian government has told the United Nations that the situation of Indigenous Peoples is "the most pressing human rights issue facing Canadians." Yet the Canadian government has repeatedly failed to implement the recommendations of UN human rights bodies concerning the protection of Indigenous Peoples' rights in Canada. (As cited on Amnesty International's website[20])

Although Canada has adopted the United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Rights, as an aspirational document, it is not a legally binding commitment. The question of whether this act of support will lead to actual change, or at least a commitment made to aspire to, is yet to be discovered. This reality suggests a need for more creative approaches - grassroots based approaches that include the female perspective and transformative methods.

A Needed Shift from Violence to Harmony

As a practitioner and student of peace building committed to a new future, the ongoing culture of violence supported by the dominating dynamics of patriarchy and patriarchal language of Canadian society, systemic practices, sociological patterns, and structural systems supporting it concerns, and at times, paralyses me in knowing how to move forward in a good way without causing further harm. The reality is that "conflict

[20] http://www.amnesty.ca/themes/indigenous_overview.php

impacts women, youth, and the web of interdependent relations that remain embedded in their everyday lives. Yet their mosaic of survival and peace-making stories as well as their lived experiences remain marginal in the politics and policy making circles" (Byrne & Senehi, 2009, p. 526). However, if one was to step back and observe the movement and leadership within community one would take note that it is in fact the women and youth leading the way. For example, the Idle No More movement was initiated by Indigenous women with thousands of Indigenous youth and allies taking to the streets in hopes of raising awareness that change is needed - that we are now in a time in history where it's necessary to be "Idle No More."

Beyond Feminism: Re-claiming Power

Schellenberg (As cited in McKay, 2005) argues that most feminist theory attempts to make a thorough analysis of life and society from a female point of view. Freedman (2002) defines feminism as a female-grounded consciousness that challenges patriarchal practices and whose purpose is to seek equality between men and women, rather than perpetuating notions of the superiority of men and inferiority of women that are apparent in patriarchy. Thus, Western feminism has been described, up until recently, to be erroneously striving for an equality that implies sameness with men, which Anderson (2010) suggests has been felt by some Indigenous women perceived as an attack on the responsibilities of women, particularly mothers.

Although a movement initiated by white middle-class women, feminism has evolved over time and offered marginalized women the opportunity to have their voices heard and included in decision making processes that influence personal and societal

issues. Bui (2007) explains that 'giving voice' has become a defining characteristic of the feminist standpoint approach that focuses on gender differences in social situations. That is, the standpoint or position of women in society provides a vantage point from which to view women's social reality (Swigonski, 1994; van Wormer, 2009). Further to this, an Indigenous standpoint approach calls for giving voice to traditional knowledges, including the leadership roles and responsibilities of women and men within culture, families, communities, and nations. Anderson (2010) discusses the notion of Indigenous feminism as a perspective to consider responsibilities rather than rights as a primary focus of reclaiming power that was once engrained in traditional (pre-contact) ways of being:

> Women's organizing is an Indigenous thing: our pre-colonial societies were sustained by women's work, women's councils, women's ceremonies and women's languages. In practice today, it means creating the space for women to get together and to do work that will ultimately benefit all our relations (Anderson, 2010, p. 89)

In the book *Keeping the Campfires Going: Native Women's Activism in Urban Communities* (Krouse & Howard, 2009), a collection of 10 different chapters highlight and share examples of how women, despite the colonial attack on their womanhood, have gathered to both resiliently resist and create positive change within a culture of violence. Howard (2009), in discussing the topic of women's class strategies as activism in Native community building in Toronto between the years of 1950-1975, explaines that Indigenous women became leaders not for themselves, but because they were looking for ways to protect and support their families.

Indigenous women come from a multitude of unique cultural backgrounds. A common thread among all Indigenous women is the shared experience of varying

impacts of settler colonialism. Muhndorf and Suzack (2010) believe that one of the pressing challenges of Indigenous feminism is to not only address the uniqueness of Indigenous women's social positions but also the collective work towards finding a basis for political action and engagement in the broader anti-colonial struggles. As they explain,

> Although Indigenous women do not share a single culture, they do have a common colonial history, and our conception of Indigenous feminism centers on the fact that the imposition of patriarchy has transformed Indigenous societies by diminishing Indigenous women's power, status and material circumstances (Muhndorf and Suzak, 2010, p. 3).

As such, the effort is not to gain equality, but to re-member and restore the leadership roles and authority that were inherent within their matriarchal[21] cultural traditions prior to the interruption of settler colonialism ensuring the protection and support of their families/communities.

Winnipeg Manitoba offers a prime example of how multiple groups and organizations led by Indigenous women are committed to working towards addressing issues faced by Indigenous women and communities. Ka Ni Kanichihk[22], Inc., for example, not only has programming that focuses on support for and education of Indigenous women, but is also committed to raising awareness in both political and social movements across the city and province. All programming within this NGO is rooted within Indigenous culture, supporting and often acting as extended family for the Indigenous community in the downtown Winnipeg area. Graduates and participants of the many Ka Ni Kanichihk programs often report, in program evaluations, feeling a

[21] It is important to acknowledge that not all Indigenous groups across Canada were Matriarchal

[22] Readers are encouraged to visit the agency's website www.kanikanichihk.ca to learn more about the important work they are leading as well as other Indigenous led organizations such as, but not limited to: http://www.ayomovement.com/ ; www.mamawi.com ; www.eyaa-keen.org ; www.urbancircletraining.com

greater sense of connection to their cultural identity, understanding their roles and responsibilities as an Indigenous women and youth, and re-membering within themselves helping to more fully embrace and re-claim their power (Ka Ni Kanichihk, 2010a; 2010b; 2011a; 2011b).

Despite the advances and positive impacts Indigenous-led organizations such as Ka Ni Kanichihk, there still remains a lot of work that needs to be done to address and shift the culture of violence that remains strongly rooted in existence today. Although not responsible for ancestors actions and choices of the past, setters are able to be response-able; able to respond to the injustices in our society today. Yet, the question of what role settlers can play on the path ahead may still feel muddled requiring further exploration and learning.

The Path Ahead: Response-Ability

> If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.
> *Lilla Watson (born 1940)*
> *Aboriginal elder, educator, & activist*

As Alfred (2009) explains, “colonialism has affected people in too many varied and complex ways for simple answers to suffice” (p. 40). There are no real definitive map for the path ahead. It would appear, however, that peace-building and reconciliation literature from around the world is ‘re-discovering’ what Indigenous people have known since the beginning of time (Rice, 2009): the task of building quality relationships is central to truly transforming local and global challenges.

Jeong (2000) suggests that in order to overcome hundreds of years of oppression and hostility, technocratic solutions, narrowly interpreted problem-solving

approaches (limited to Western perspectives), and indifference to the dynamics supporting an unjust status quo will not lead to true social transformation. Theories and tools for resolving a conflictual divide of unjust inequalities and relations can be made more meaningful by exploring the holistic meanings of peace rooted in Indigenous worldviews while envisioning and courageously disrupting inner and outer colonized-colonizer power relations. This process should not be about placing blame, but embracing a sense of 'response-ability' – that is, knowing that all Canadians have an ability to respond and a responsibility to choose — to choose to become aware of privilege, choose to re-cognize (un-learn) colonial perspective, choose to question status quo, and choose to stand for systemic change that supports true social justice that not solely serves the privileged, but all living things including Mother Earth. An individual who blindly follows status quo without mindful choice ultimately defaults to embracing the culture of violence that has been created through settler colonialism reinforcing a worldview of domination, social stratification, and the pursuit and accumulation of power (Barker, 2010),

> The Settler that chooses a decolonizing existence must adjust to new and challenging realities. First, and most importantly, there must be an understanding that Settler people, including those who reject colonial society and culture, may continue to benefit from that society and culture at many levels. There must further be an understanding that, in order to restore a measure of balance to the inevitable power relationships and imbalances in society, Settler people must be willing to take the power that has been granted to them by virtue of their 'membership' in Settler society and put it at the disposal of those whose power has been violently co-opted or stolen. (Barker, 2010, p. 322-324).

As the author is suggesting, even those who choose a decolonizing existence will continue to benefit from their privilege and membership within settler society. As part of the decolonizing work a conscious choice on process and reflection must be made to

continuously check and weaponize privilege and power. This is not to gain power-over, but to action a commitment of empowering those whose power has been violently co-opted.

Barker (2010) asserts, “no government or court can legislate how we think and feel; as such, relying upon these institutions to solve these problems abdicates responsibility for our individual and collective actions, and pours even the most well-intentioned energy into a bottomless pit” (p. 328). Ultimately, we are responsible for ourselves – consciously or unconsciously, we have choice. Henderson (2008) writes “nothing will change for the better because of ink on paper – regardless of the authority of the paper, or the ink; nothing will change without a transformation in the sphere of human consciousness” (p.100).

Barker (2010) suggests the power to change a society must be generated by society itself, and if societal change is to be pursued seriously, the change must be fundamental. If responsibility is considered to be a mindful ability to respond (response-able), rather than attempting to build new checks and balances or government departments, a new way of being and doing must be explored to ensure the response is done in a good way opposed to habitual colonial patterns. Bishop (1994) suggests such a commitment will mean embarking on a completely unknown journey – “a journey that can unfold only one step at a time, with confusion and danger along the way, and where the end is a mystery” (p. 124).

Sutherland (2007) believes we are in an important time of transition and change. If there ever was a time to embark on a journey towards building a new future, the time is now. The most fundamental first step for such a journey is within each of us. As we

choose to awaken to what we thought to be 'true' and commit to a raised consciousness and respectful way of being and relating. By doing this, the ripple effect will slowly shift status quo and lead to greater *ni-noo'-da-di-win'* (harmony)[23].

As defined within the Oxford Dictionary (1997), the term ally, as a noun, is a person in alliance with another. Synonyms include accomplice, associate, collaborator, colleague, helper, and partner. As a verb, ally is defined as to combine forces, team up, and unite. With a military linkage, ally is a term that many people are not comfortable with as it is simply a word that, depending on the perspectives and beliefs of a person, could be as dangerous as a person's enemy. The work of a settler, for example, that dons the title of ally but maintains a colonial perspective and value-base will simply perpetuate a colonial agenda through the reinforcement of beliefs, systems and structures. If, however, a settler works from a consciously chosen decolonizing stance, supporting Indigenous led activities, they will have a more profound impact on the work being done.

Lynn Gehl, an Algonquin Anishinaabe-kwe from the Ottawa River Valley area, helps provide further insights into the differences of a colonized ally perspective that simply shares space along the path to that of an ally committed to sharing space from a place of consciously response-able commitment to decolonizing action and alliance work. Table Three breaks down Gehl's (2014)[24] narrative analysis into a chart form.

[23] This translation ni-noo'-da-di-win (harmony) is Benton-Banai, E. (2010). The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway. University of Minnesota Press; 2 edition.

[24] http://www.lynngehl.com/black-face-blogging/a-colonized-ally-meets-a-decolonized-ally-this-is-what-they-learn

Table Three:
Colonized Ally and Decolonized Ally

Colonized Ally	Decolonized Ally
Stands in front	Stands behind
Stands behind an oppressive patriarchy	Stand behind women and children
Makes assumptions about the process	Values there may be principles in the process they are not aware of
Wants knowledge now!	Values their own relationship to the knowledge
Finds an Indigenous token	Ensures inclusion and reflective voice
Equates their money and hard work on the land as meaning land ownership	Knows that land ownership is more about social hierarchy and privilege
Projects guilt	Knows it is their work to do
Projects emotions	Knows Indigenous people have too much to deal with already
Has no respect for Indigenous intellectuals	Knows Indigenous people have their own intellectuals
Has no idea that they need to decolonize	Understands that they have to continually decolonize
Has no idea of the concomitant realities of Indigenous oppression	Understands the many, layered, and intersectional oppressions Indigenous Peoples live under
Speaks for Indigenous people	Listens
Takes on work an Indigenous person can do and is doing	Takes on other work that needs to be done
Makes things worse	Understands
Says “it is time to get over it”	Realizes one’s relationship to the harm is subjective
Will dismiss the vulnerability and risk of sharing truth	Recognize the hard work telling this truth is

Regardless of what label a settler wishes to don, whether it be ally[25], peace builder, or helper; what is most vital is the perspective from which the person wishes to work. Waziyatawin and Yellow Bird (2005) maintain that “first and foremost, decolonization must occur in our own minds” (p. 2). They further explain that the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is so deeply entrenched that

[25] Another author that has written about to the concept of ally is Anne Bishop www.becominganally.ca

challenging status quo can be uncomfortable and intimidating. As such, the first step towards decolonization is to begin questioning the legitimacy of colonization: “once we recognize the truth of this injustice we can think about ways to resist and challenge colonial institutions and ideologies” (p. 2).

Waziyatawin and Yellow Bird (2005) also explain that decolonization is not passive but requires action or ***praxis***. Friere (2010) contends that true praxis is only achieved if there are both reflection and action: “reflection – true reflection – leads to action. On the other hand, when the situation calls for action, that action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection” (p. 66). Freire further contends revolutionary praxis involves critical reflection, dialogue, and presence that supports a sense of unity that thereby rejects practices such as manipulation, sloganizing, depositing, prescription, and actions linked to domination or continued colonialism.

My attention is drawn back to the opening quote in this section where Austrailian Aboriginal Elder Lila Watson states, ‘If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together[26].’ ‘Working together’ aligns with the critical points that Freire (2010) identifies as ‘revolutionary’ praxis: thinking and acting *with* the people versus *for* or *without* people. Therefore, it seems that how we ground and related within our praxis is

[26] This quote is well known by many activist groups. The possible origin of the quote is reported to be a speech given by Lila Watson at the 1985 United Nations Decade for Women’s Conference in Nairobi (as described in the first link). It has also been identified that Lila Watson is not comfortable with taking sole credit for this quote as it had developed through working with an Aboriginal Activist Group in the 1070s – refer to references cited. https://books.google.ca/books?id=4FRNBAAAQBAJ&pg=PA7&lpg=PA7&dq=lilla+watson+quote&source=bl&ots=fBuIJ2P1cQ&sig=u5XNLR765zK1xIYkAU1SwQaXADA&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjWoKPN5N7RAhUi7oMKHaoEC6Y4FBDoAQgaMAA#v=onepage&q=lilla%20watson%20quote&f=false

as important, if not more important, than the labels we may give ourselves, or the outcomes we work towards.

Summary

Einstein once described the definition of insanity as doing the same things over and over, yet expecting different results. The culture of violence within Canada, and more specifically the reality of violence against Indigenous women is deeply rooted within Canadian history, yet invisibly and indifferently hidden within the shadows of Canadian society. Jeong (2000) suggests one of the necessary elements along the pursuit to peace involves deconstructing the dichotomy imposed on marginalized others. In Canada, Indigenous people, more specifically Indigenous women, have experienced firsthand the negative and devastating impacts such a process can have on a way of life. Remembering Einstein's definition of insanity, I would argue the focus should incorporate the re-membering of the original ways of life rooted in beliefs and values of the original and rightful founders of this land as the orientation for finding the path forward to creating a new future.

Feminism, although not a concept fully embraced by all Indigenous women because of its original roots with non-Indigenous women and Western worldviews, could provide an initial window of understanding. More specifically however, Indigenous feminism and standpoint feminism offer a resilient and powerful starting point for settlers learning to better expand their awareness and understanding from a perspective that has been historically silenced.

Another challenge in moving forward is related to something Jeong (2000) reminds us of: those benefiting from the status quo have little incentive for taking the issues raised by the underprivileged seriously. With a long history of settler colonialism

and introduced cycles of social reproduction, all Canadians will need to make a commitment for change. Not just governments or Indigenous women, but all Canadians. This will not be an easy journey.

The reality is, violence against Indigenous women has a long and deeply rooted history impacting identity, patterns of behaviour, programmed social conditioning and socially structured systems not easy to challenge or change - but, it is not impossible. We have learned a considerable amount about how to change a people's way of being to support foreign ways of doing based on completely contrary values and worldviews over the last 150 years. We need to learn from this historic legacy. More importantly, we need to learn from the resilience, resistance and grassroots work that women have been doing to build/re-member commUNITY and create positive change. We must remember that despite (and in spite of) the colonial agenda to destroy and dis-member their very existence, Indigenous women have respectfully learned how to share the path along the way with their trusted allies.

Chapter 3:

Describing The Path – Re-Search Methodology

Introduction

When traveling along any path, there may often be great expanses that initially seem impossible to cross. When it was time to start this re-search that was exactly how it felt to me, impossible. Here I was at the water's edge, needing to get across what seemed like a never ending expansion to complete what was needed to be done, in order to achieve the goal set out in front of me known as a thesis.

Picture 2: Standing at water's edge needing to get across what seemed to be a never ending expansion

In the early days, I looked for what I would describe as quick or easy answers – something that I thought might be 'tried and true.' I would think to myself 'I just want to get this thing over with.' But I knew in my heart that this search had to be different than what Hall, Dell, Fornssler, Hopkins, and Mushquash (2015) describe as a 'helicopter approach' where researchers drop in to collect data and leave with no reciprocated community-defined valued benefits or outcomes. This type of approach, where researchers descend upon a community to gather information in the name of research has been something I have both observed and experienced. Although

changes are slowing being made as a result of the vital contributions of a growing number of Indigenous scholars challenging the historical practices of research, settlers also hold response-ability to question and challenge Western-based status quo while developing/conducting research. As I explain more fully in the pages to follow, doing a research project for the purpose of attaining a degree was of a lesser concern to me than engaging in a re-search process that intentionally prioritized learning through process and relational accountability more so than the pre-determined time expectations (time) and outcome (thesis completion and graduation).

The harsh reality of Indigenous Peoples being the subject of research, often with no direct benefit to themselves personally or collectively, is well documented by scholars such as, but not limited to, Roberts (2005), Smith (1999), Absolon & Willett (2005), and Lambert (2014). Smith (1999) notes “the word itself, ‘research,’ is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world’s vocabulary” (p. 1). It seems that, research practices have been structured within and informed by a Western lens which ultimately influences the design, theories, and methodologies. These research approaches match the needs of the researcher and not the needs, customs, and standards of Indigenous Peoples and their communities (Chirgwin, 2010; Getty, 2010; Smith, 2005; Struthers, 2001; Wilson, 2008).

Wilson (2008) asserts that a change has begun over the past decade with more being done to bring Indigenous communities into research processes that better support research becoming more visible and beneficial to communities. This change has been triggered by the increasing number of Indigenous scholars and allies creating culturally sensitive and informed approaches to research grounded in what has been described

as an Indigenous research paradigm using methodology that incorporates their own cosmology, worldview, epistemology, and ethical beliefs (Wilson, 2008). Absolon (2011) suggests that such approaches have often been referred to as 'alternative information gathering' methods, arguing that if Indigenous Peoples were to describe their methodologies as 'alternative' that they consent to becoming 'Other':

> Being Othered or alternative depends on whose turf it is. If it's not your turf then I guess you're the other. We must own our own turf within Indigenous search agendas; if the methods are Indigenous, within an Indigenous context and for Indigenous purposes, then it is normal and the mainstay of knowledge collection (Absolon, 2011, p. 47).

With growing numbers of Indigenous academics publishing and producing research grounded within Indigenous methodologies and knowledges, the historical meaning of what constitutes legitimized knowledge is shifting. Kovach (2009) further explains that "as the academic landscape shifts with an increasing Indigenous presence, there is a desire among a growing community of non-Indigenous academics to move beyond the binaries found within Indigenous-settler relations to construct new, mutual forms of dialogue, research, theory, and action" (p. 12). With this as my inspiration, I began searching for other options than those 'tried and true' ways that lay safely within the status quo of non-Indigenous approaches to research.

This chapter is organized into three sections. Knowing that the history of research is an important consideration when choosing methodology, the first section provides an orientation to how this re-search got started and provides some background and perspective to the choices I've made in the design of the re-search approach. The second section describes the path that the search set out to follow, highlighting the

theory and approaches that helped navigate the work. The third section creates a summarizing 'snap shot' of how and what was followed as part of the mapped path.

Getting Started: Some Background and Perspective

Completing the classes of the Master's program was a relatively easy task (albeit a lot of work). The classes and course structure were familiar with the requirements and learning objectives strictly marked out – even with my contrary learning 'gift[27]' I have figured out what and how I need to approach the Western educational system to produce enough to 'pass' (as understood within a structured colonial status quo). Once the classes were over however, I faced my greatest challenge in discovering where and how to get started.

The thesis work, in my mind, is different than classes because it provides opportunity for students to determine focus, process, and intention of their search. In my case for example, it was a vivid dream that not only validated how I had been struggling with moving forward, but solidified the importance of ensuring the search was grounded in an Indigenous paradigm interweaved with collaborative participatory research and storywork. Archibald (2008) validates my experience by stating that "I have come to appreciate that dreams can be a source of Indigenous knowledge and that they can provide guidance for Indigenous research methodology" (p. 3).

In my dream I was with a group of Indigenous women fearlessly freefalling high above the ground. I had the sense that we had all chosen to be there and to be together. As we navigated our situation, fear was not a factor until suddenly a black

[27] Learning in a conventional classroom has never been easy for me. For most of my life, I always considered my learning challenges (dyslexia) a curse. It hasn't been until later in life when I have come to embrace my unique way of seeing and learning as a gift.

helicopter appeared trying to harmfully separate the group, attempting to break the connection and space we had created. Without words, we simply looked at each other knowing what needed to be done. One by one, we began to swarm the helicopter. As soon as it sensed what was happening, it gathered what it needed and immediately hid in the clouds high above. Determined to not allow the threat of this black helicopter to harm us any longer, we collectively made our way to the clouds in search of it. A small break in the clouds provided a window of opportunity to locate the helicopter and together we combined our different skills, collective strength, creativity, resilience, and knowledge along with our common purpose, and worked together to destroy the threat to our security and well-being.

A few days later, I was in a meeting with colleagues and without mentioning knowledge of my dream, the discussion became focused on the importance of collaborative participatory partnerships when someone shared their experience of the detrimental impacts of the 'helicopter approach' where researchers drop in, collect data, and leave often causing disruptions to the community leaving no benefits (Hall, Dell, Fornssler, Hopkins, & Mushquash, 2015).

Two-eyed Seeing: Based on the insight of this dream, further validation from the group discussion, and over 20 years of experience living and working within small communities and circles, the path became clear to me. My work needed to be rooted in an Indigenous paradigm using a collaborative participatory approach. An approach that I found useful was led by the guiding principles of Two-Eyed Seeing in which the re-searcher is a cultural learner. The concept for Two-Eyed Seeing provides guiding principles for bringing together different perspectives in research that originated with the

work of Mi'kmaq Elders Murdena and Albert Marshall from Eskosoni First Nation, in collaboration with Dr. Cheryl Bartlett at Cape Breton University's Institute for Integrative Science and Health/*Toqwa'tu'kl Kjijitaqnn* (Iwama, Marshall, Marshall, & Bartlett, 2009). The authors, Bartlett, Marshall, Marshall, and Iwama (2012) explain that "two-eyed seeing adamantly, respectfully and passionately asks that we bring together our different ways of knowing to motivate people, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike, to use all our understandings so we can leave the world a better place and not compromise the opportunities for our youth (in the sense of Seven Generations) through our own inaction" (p. 11). As one of the Elders, Albert Marshall, explains two-eyed seeing is hard to convey to academics as it does not fit into any particular subject area or discipline. The advantage of Two-Eyed Seeing is that you are always fine tuning your mind into different places at once, you are always looking for another perspective and better way of doing things (Bartlett, Marshall, Marshall, and Iwama, 2012, p. 11). The ultimate premise of Two-Eyed Seeing refers to learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of Western knowledges and ways of knowing - using both eyes together while finding a way forward that will benefit all (Bartlett, Marshall, Marshall, and Iwama, 2012).

Two-Eyed Seeing is something that resonates with me and the members of the Community Advisory Group as many of the stories shared while we were together spoke to how they walk between the two worlds of their Indigenous ways and the Western world in which they live. For example, one participant stated:

> When you walk into a room you have to be respectful to those people. Because you are a different person, I am not going to force them to change their whole world because I am there. They need to be respectful to me because I am different. So that's what needs to happen – is more of a respectful shift going into

> non-Indigenous and people coming into Indigenous communities is that it is more of an understanding of the environment that you are walking into…Understanding one another, that would be the whole thing (Kitchen Table 1 transcript, November 2015).

As referred to in the quote, when entering into a situation, it's important to respectfully enter with 'two eyes' – acknowledging the differences while being open to learning how to better understand each other and finding common ground that will be/is beneficial for all.

Cultural learning: In order to even be remotely able to "see" the strengths of a different way of knowing than your own, there must be a commitment and openness to learn from the other within a 'co-learning' journey discovering ways to engage with each other and diverse knowledges in ways that are accessible, meaningful, and respectful for all, expert and non-expert (Bartlett, Marshall, Marshall and Iwama, 2012). Archibald (2008) explains that "a researcher who enters a First Nations cultural context with little or no cultural knowledge is viewed as a learner" (p. 37). Although I have lived and worked in/with Aboriginal communities, groups and organizations for over half my lifetime, and am raising our children to embrace and practice their Aboriginal cultural worldviews, I would never claim to be anything other than a cultural learner (Stowe, 2014).

Picture 3: Walking Gently with Two-Eyed Seeing by being open to learning from all that is around you

I have been gifted with the opportunity to learn, experience and live many cultural ways, but I will always, have much to learn. I don't believe I could ever fully understand Indigenous reality because I live with white skin privilege and benefit in many ways from colonization; without being directly impacted from colonizing experiences such as residential schools or dislocation from family, community, land, language and identity defining spiritual ways of being and knowing for example, it is impossible for me to fully understand Indigenous experience and reality. This is learning that will continue for the rest of my days as I 'grow forward' walking gently as a cultural learner.

Perspectivism: These two guiding philosophies, Two-Eyed Seeing and cultural learning, are similar to what Folger, Poole, and Stutman (2001) refer to as 'perspectivism'. According to the authors, perspectivism holds that although there is no best perspective, there are many ways of viewing a phenomenon and a field of choices to select from. It also influences how one views their world, guides the search for answers, determines what questions are worth asking, and what data is worth collecting. The authors further emphasize:

Picture 4: The Importance of Acknowledging the Power of Perspective: where you stand impacts your experience and view

> The assumptions you privilege and the premises you prefer form your perspective, form the lens through which you will view conflict. As the metaphor suggests, this lens will colour your vision, framing what you will and will not see. Your perspective provides focus. It brings conflict processes into sharp relief, revealing what is relevant for study. All scholars and practitioners who study conflict processes must make

> similar choices. The substantive assumptions or premises from which one views conflict constitutes that perspective (Folger, Poole, and Stutman, 2001, p. 40)

Everyone has a perspective. Whether people are aware of their perspective and how it influences choices is another matter. As such, the importance of Two-eyed Seeing and cultural learning is critical for seeing multiple realities through an Indigenous reality.

Introducing the Participants: Indigenous Peoples have always carried knowledges and ways of knowing that have profound and long-established understandings about the value of multiple perspectives and collaborations (Jeong, 2009; Bartlett, Marshall, Marshall and Iwama, 2012). However, this knowledge has been and mostly continues to be silenced, discounted and not accepted as valid knowledge within Western thought or institutions. Dei (2000) writes:

> The interplay of different knowledges is perhaps one of the many reasons why Indigenous knowledges must be taught in the academy. The goal of integrating (i.e., centring) Indigenous knowledges in the academy is to affirm this collaborative dimension of knowledge and, at the same time, to address the emerging call for academic knowledge to speak to the diversity of histories, events, experiences and ideas that have shaped human growth and development. And, if we recognize that knowledge is not static but rather constantly being created and recreated in context, then Indigenous knowledges need to be an integral part of the ongoing co-creation and re-creation of academic knowledge/work (Dei, 2000, p.4)

With all this shaping my awareness, prior to specifically defining what this search would be, I invited a group of Indigenous women who I knew through a program that I had been co-facilitating entitled, Aboriginal Women Reclaiming Our Power, or commonly known as Moon Voices, hosted by Ka Ni Kanichihk Inc in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

The women ranged in age from Grandmothers to youth and had all been involved in the Moon Voices program in different capacities. This initial pre-research gathering

was informal and was planned as an opportunity to explore multiple perspectives, through two-eyed seeing to discuss different possibilities of a re-search project. This first visit was not a part of the actual research project, but an initial pre-research discussion as to what the project could be. I wanted to ensure that whatever the project ended up being was informed and guided by Indigenous women opposed to a settler's perception of what I thought Indigenous women might support.

To ensure ethical and cultural protocol was honoured, each woman who attended this first initial pre-research gathering was offered tobacco and a small gift that included a journal, pen and post-it notes as a way for all to capture intriguing thoughts throughout the discussion and to continue to write notes once our gathering ended. The evening was filled with laughter, great food and reflective conversation that helped to inform the focus of this search. The offering of tobacco (a symbolic gift) and sharing of food, is honouring of cultural ways of being and doing that emphasizes the importance of process. A process rooted within an Indigenous context valuing beliefs such as reciprocity, sacredness of womanhood, and spiritual orientation. This helped create a starting point for the journey ahead in a good way and from a place that privileged an Indigenous voice. More will be shared about the participants in a later section.

As Bartlett, Marshall, Marshall and Iwama (2012) explain, a journey is the way in which experiences unfold. With the dream as the 'spark' and the informal initial meeting as the inspiration, the stepping stones began to reveal themselves across the impossible divide mapping a path forward.

The Mapped Path

The initial meeting solidified the importance of ensuring the search was grounded in an Indigenous Paradigm modelling a collaborative participatory process utilizing storywork within ethical spaces. A vital element of this path forward was ensuring the process of the search modeled what was intended to be learned. To better understand, let's review the mapped path in more detail.

Picture 5: The Mapped Path: Choosing a path that aligns with the vision of your journey is important.

Indigenous Research Paradigm:

Wilson (2008) suggests, "an Indigenous research paradigm is made up of an Indigenous ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology" (p. 13) and needs to be followed through all stages of the search. Absolon (2011) further explains that an Indigenous paradigm "instigates a paradigm shift in our thinking and approach to Indigenous re-search; this shift moves us from having a 'perspective' to 'researching' from an Indigenous worldview" (p. 56). Ultimately, Indigenous thought and knowledge guides how we search for knowledge – a search that considers reciprocity and interdependence: "Indigenous re-search is about being human and calls all human beings to wake from the colonial trance and rejoin the web of life" (Absolon, 2011, p. 31). It is this epistemological foundation that differentiates Indigenous research from Western methodologies (Kovach, 2009). At the very core of Indigenous epistemology is relational accountability (Wilson, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Hart,

2010) that requires a holistic use and transmission of information (Wilson, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Hart, 2010). Atkinson (As cited in Wilson, 2008) believes that Indigenous research must be guided by key guiding principles including:

1. Aboriginal people themselves approve the research and the research methods;
2. A knowledge and consideration of community and the diversity and unique nature that each individual brings to community;
3. Ways of relating and acting within community with an understanding of the principles of reciprocity and responsibility;
4. Research participants must feel safe and be safe, including respecting issues of confidentially;
5. A non-intrusive observation, or quietly aware watching;
6. A deep listening and hearing with more than the ears;
7. A reflection non-judgmental consideration of what is being seen and heard;
8. Having learnt from the listening a purposeful plan to act with actions informed by learning, wisdom, and acquired knowledge;
9. Responsibility to act with fidelity in relationship to what has been heard, observed, and learnt;
10. Listening and observing the self as well as in relationship to others;
11. Acknowledgement that the researcher brings to the research his or her subjective self (Wilson, 2008, p. 58).

Having such guiding principles and questions from Indigenous researchers and academics was an informative resource to ensure there were clear guide posts along the path from beginning to end and beyond. There were many occasions, both natural and intentional, where time was dedicated to ensuring this was not merely a topic that was being intellectualized, but learning in action - a praxis.

As I have mentioned, although I am the writer of this document holding the label of ‘research lead’ – I by no means hold any authority or ownership of this work. However I take full responsibility for what is written within these pages. I have not been detached and objective throughout the process; although, it could be questioned as to if total objectivity in research could truly happen, or people only think this. I hold the

concept of relational accountability as a benchmark for the ideas within this work, and to all those (directly or indirectly, seen and unseen) that facilitated my learning along the way; those that entrusted me to hear and learn from their stories, experiences and contributions. Similarly, I present this work to you, the reader, while acknowledging that you will filter the work through your own lens and experiences thereby building your own relationship to the ideas and knowledge that I share. As Anderson (1997) argues, "Knowledge is of no use if it does not serve relationships" (p. 14). It is my hope that not only the words within this written work, but also how this work has been conducted offers value to the many interconnected relationships linked to its different layers and stages.

Wilson (2008) further emphasises that "relationships don't just shape Indigenous reality, they are our reality" (p. 144). To be relationally accountable, careful choices must be made in the selection of topics, methods of data collection, analysis and in the way the information is created. To ensure a relationally accountable approach was honoured, collaborative participatory and story work approaches lit the path forward.

Collaborative Participatory Re-Search: Kirby, Greaves, and Reid (2006) explain collaborative re-search is about praxis, a merging of theory and practice. It is about producing useful knowledge through both process and content. Similarly, participatory re-search involves a social action process biased in favour of marginalized groups while legitimizing the knowledge people are capable of producing. The authors further explain that participatory re-search involves participants in the entire process

presenting people as researchers in pursuit of answers to questions of daily struggle and survival.

Based on the feedback, co-learning, and guidance of that initial pre-research meeting held with Indigenous women, the re-search proposal was drafted. Once approved by ethics, I once again turned to Indigenous community to help guide the process forward. As part of the collaborative participatory approach, an Indigenous Community Advisory Group of six women was formed that contained a mix of women from the initial informal discussion. The final group selection was based on the women's availability and a pre-existing relational connection through the community program, Moon Voices. This relational connection provided the foundation for continued development, growth and co-learning within a strength-based, safe and trusting circle. This speaks to the importance of how relationships and connection with people is just as important, if not more so, than theory or model when working within an Indigenous paradigm. The relational connections of the initial meeting and formation of the Community Advisory Group was as much a part of the learning as the research itself. It emphasises for me, just how critical determining the process of research is more important than the theoretical orientation and actual outcomes. Based on my experience through this project, I would argue that tremendous opportunity for deep connection and learning is lost when the re-searcher remains objective and external from the process of engagement with the people and/or subject being explored.

The Community Advisory Group officially met 3 times throughout the project; first, to review the overall project purpose, concepts and approaches; second, to review and

provide their own stories to the ‘kitchen table discussion’ questions (interviews) and identify possible community leaders to connect with; and third, to review the data collected in a ‘sense making’ session, providing insights and thoughts to inform the development and presentation of the written component of the search. The Group was also in connection via email, Facebook and phone when there were questions, hesitations and/or when I was paralyzed with complete mind blocks. Once the written piece of this search is drafted, the Community Advisory Group will also be invited to review, provide feedback and approve the final completion before it is formally submitted to Graduate Studies.

The process of identifying participants for the kitchen table discussions (interviews) was originally described as a ‘snowball sampling effect’, but is more accurately described as ‘relational sampling’ suggested by Hopkins (2012) as relationship based natural flow and lifeworld connectivity. The process began with the Community Advisory Group randomly identifying grassroots women who they view as ‘leaders’ in the community working on creating positive change. The leaders did not necessarily carry ‘titles’ or have high paying positions, but were ‘out there working with people, making a difference.’

The Community Advisory Group and lead researcher identified research participants together by humbly approaching different grassroots community leaders to explain what the re-search was about, acknowledging their community contributions through community-based collaborative alliances, and to enquire if they would like to participate. Most, but not all women approached indicated their interest in sharing their stories as part of the project. For those who declined, it was mostly due to scheduling

conflicts and inability to find a time to connect – which speaks to one of the limitations of this study.

Some Indigenous traditions accept that all things happen for a reason, and in adhering to the cultural imperative of 'non-interference[28]; perhaps the timing wasn't yet right, and when schedules align and paths cross once again, we would connect. This in itself is a lesson of this journey: Michell (p. 65) explains "In our Cree belief system, there is a time and a place for everything and there is also a right way of doing things" (p. 67). In the end, in addition to the Advisory Group, 6 Indigenous women and 6 non-Indigenous women participated in Kitchen Table discussions using open ended questions to help guide the sharing and knowledge exchange.

A challenge I have struggled with throughout this project is related to the concept of time. Graduate Studies has a predetermined timelines and expectations for research. This journey has stretched well beyond these expectations for a number of reasons that I feel is important to share. The first factor relates back to the importance of process. How this research was done has been, and will always be, more important than the outcome. Considering the discussion on the legacy of colonialism and the impacts this has had on relationships, rushing through research and missing the opportunity to connect and honour the relationships within the work is not only a lost opportunity, but I would also argue a continuation of colonial legacy. The second factor relates to the relationship and learning this work has been having on myself as a student and lead

[28] All traditional Aboriginal cultures have specific cultural imperatives such as non-interference, sharing, responsibility of one's actions, etc. that influence actions and beliefs, however, Poonwassie & Charter (2001) remind us to always remember the diversity of Indigenous nations and the importance of "developing an in-depth understanding and respect for the values, beliefs, and practices of Aboriginal peoples in a specific geographical area is vital to supportive healing practice" (p. 66)

researcher. Just when I think that I have it figured out and nearing completion, there is more for me to learn and I must re-engage my learning relationship with the project.

This has been even more challenging since my family and I had moved from Winnipeg to Northwestern Ontario during the project. It reminded me just how easy it can be to become disconnected when you are at a distance and surrounded by other work and distractions. Finally, as a result of being so far from Winnipeg and the importance of wanting to ensure a strong relationship was nurtured, additional time was needed to make several trips back to the city to conduct the Kitchen Table discussions face to face.

In reflecting back, I acknowledge that the process has not been perfect, but I made the commitment to put people and process over outcome. As a result, I did all I could to be flexible and adapt to the changing realities of my own circumstances and those of my partners. There were many times throughout the process that I really struggled with continuing, but my sense of accountability to the women who had graciously agreed to share their knowledge, time and energy is what has driven my commitment to complete the work. Even if the time required to complete this project extends beyond the time allocations expected by the academy for successful degree completion, the maintenance of my relationships with my Indigenous community partners will remain my number one priority.

As part of each discussion all participants were asked for their insights and ideas as to how the findings and outcomes of this search could be shared with community in a valuable way. Once the writing process is officially complete, each participant will have

the option to receive a copy of the final paper along with an update of how the Community Advisory Group plans on sharing the findings with the larger community.

Storywork Within Ethical Space: Indigenous scholar Jo Ann Archibald articulates in her 2008 book Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body and Spirit that the story-research process exemplifies what research should do by enabling "people to sit together and talk meaningfully about how their Indigenous knowledge could be effectively used for education and for living a good life and to think about possibilities for overcoming problems experienced in their communities" (Archibald, 2008, p. 81). Storywork is a 'journey of learning.'

While I was growing up the Kitchen was always a gathering place. There would be entire days on weekends when time would pass visiting and drinking coffee/tea with friends, family, and visitors sharing stories of exciting news or just reminiscing. The Kitchen is a place where people gather to share, communicate and connect with each other; if conditions allow, the kitchen provides a welcoming, safe, and nurturing space that can both support and foster synergy through respectful connection. This was the premise of why a 'kitchen table' sharing approach to data collection was chosen over straight interviewing.

In alignment with this, kitchen table discussions had food, tea and a comfortable informal atmosphere that attempted to create 'ethical space'. A term coined by Poole (1972), 'ethical space' provides "a venue to step outside of our allegiances, to detach from the cages of our mental worlds and assume as position where human-to-human dialogue can occur" (Bartlett, Marshall, Marshall, & Iwama, 2012, p. 6). Ermine, Sinclair,

and Jeffrey (2004) believe ethical space requires dialogue about intentions, values, and assumptions of the entities towards the research process in order to help channels to be opened for new ways of thinking and understanding (Bartlett, Marshall, Marshall, & Iwama, 2012). Great care was taken to ensure all details of this search were reviewed with each participant. Every effort was taken to ensuring an ethical space that was welcoming, safe, and inclusively collaborative.

This concept became even more important after my relocation back “home” to Northwestern Ontario, Robinson Superior Treaty area. The geographical distance and ‘dis-location’ from my re-search community created a real disconnection between myself as lead researcher, and the participants. Aware of my accountability to the relationship with those who agreed to ‘share space’ along this path, it was not only respectful, but necessary to travel back to the city to meet with everyone face to face. The trips back to the city offered not only the opportunity to literally ‘share space’ with participants, but to review the discussions and reconnect with each other. This was, above all, the priority – sometimes it meant the actual discussion questions would have to happen during another visit. This approach impacted the length of time it has taken to complete this research. However, it was felt that to merely discuss the questions over the phone with limited to no ‘relational (re)connection, would not have been conducive to the creation of ethical space or practice of Indigenous ways.

Each discussion was held at the most convenient and comfortable location for the participant(s) ranging from a community office space to park, home or restaurant.

Picture 6: Sense Making of Overwhelming Amount of Information: Sitting in the center of an overwhelming amount of information makes it difficult to find focus, find meaning, or make any sense of what it is in front of you. It's important to step back, connect with the ideas and be open to the possibilities you may not have considered.

Depending on scheduling, availability, and timing, some of the discussions had more than one participant around the table while others were one to one. Confidentiality and safety were discussed at the forefront of each meeting ensuring that any hesitation or concerns were discussed and addressed prior to starting. Each discussion was audiotaped and transcribed. I also create a summary of some of the key messages of each participant, which was then shared (if chosen), for review, revision and approval. As per cultural protocol, and similar to the initial meeting, each participant was offered tobacco and a small gift[29]. The gift was symbolic of co-learning, nurtured connection, and self-reflection. It included items such as a journal, tea, candles, sweet (chocolate) and purple (colour symbolic of healing) scarf – all symbols of our journey together.

In the end, the participants of this project included an Indigenous Advisory Group of six Indigenous women of different ages. The Advisory Group played three roles: (1) offering guidance to ensure the process of the project was grounded within an Indigenous context honouring cultural values, practices and protocols, (2) connection

[29] Gifting is "a gesture of relationship between people, animals, spirits, and other entities in the universe, given in the interests of creating ties, honouring them, or asking for assistance and direction" (Doerfler, Stark, & Niigaanwewidam, 2013, p. xv)

with other Indigenous community leaders as suggestions for participants in the kitchen table discussions, and (3) engagement in kitchen table discussions offering insights, guidance and recommendations to inform and guide the project.

In addition to the Advisory Group, there were an additional six Indigenous women and six non-Indigenous women who consented to participate in a Kitchen Table discussion sharing their experiences and stories of working within community and building alliances. The participants all had the option of participating in either individual interviews or attending a group discussion. Although group discussions where often the first choice, scheduling often made it difficult to coordinate with a number of other people. Each discussion lasted between 1 to 2 hours at a maximum.

Once the discussions were completed, I listened and re-listened to the recordings. I found that by only focusing on the transcripts, the stories within the discussions lost a sense of context. Archibald (2008) explains that whenever oral traditions are presented in textual form, gestures, tone, rhythm, and personality of the storytellers are left out thereby limiting understanding. By re-listening to the discussions, I was also able to truly listen deeply being mindful of the pauses, the tones, and the rhythm of the discussions. As I listened I took more notes and was able to ‘hear’ more of the stories that I had missed in our original discussions. This was a valuable gift, much more valuable than the transcripts themselves.

Regardless of how many times I re-listened to each discussion, there were ‘golden nuggets’ of wisdom that I had not heard before. I could have easily gotten stuck in this process and found myself laughing out loud each time I re-listened to every discussion – it was like being back in the moment once again. I truly enjoyed, and

appreciated each discussion and the gifts of knowledge shared. With the ‘discussion data’ collected there was an overwhelming amount of information, it felt, yet again, impossible—impossible to make sense of it all.

To break things down into what felt to be more manageable pieces, the ‘sense making’ phase was a twofold process. The first phase entailed ‘pattern-finding’ among all the discussions. Using flipchart paper surrounding the walls of my workspace, patterns that interweaved in and out of all the discussions were pulled and mapped out linking quotes, connections, and synergies. In this initial process, the Indigenous and non-Indigenous wisdom was mapped separately offering an Indigenous lens and a non-Indigenous lens of the collected data. This information was then put into a chart.

The second phase of the process involved another gathering with the Community Advisory Group to review the data within what was described by the group as a safe space. The group shared a meal, while engaging in reflective discussion, which facilitated more sharing, co-learning, caring and genuine synergetic connection. The wisdom within the discussion data revealed the reflective learning of the search process and the way it evolved.

During this meeting it was also discussed how this work would be written and presented. Guidance was provided and I came away knowing that the writing needed to come from an authentic place; to not just “talk” about the key elements necessary in working collaboratively in a good way, but demonstrate the “walk” of how working in a good way within collaborative alliances can be, look and feel. Before we get too far into the golden nuggets identified within the sense making, which is the focus of the next chapter, let’s just review the journey and path that was followed.

Summary

Instead of continuing on in this very Western way of explaining myself, I am choosing to take a bit of a different approach in creating the 'snap shot.' If you recall, I had listed what Atkinson (2001) believed important principles necessary for Indigenous Research. To help create this 'snap shot' these principles have been broken down in Table Four. For each principle there is a brief summary of how the principle was integrated into the journey's focus, mapping the path, and sense making.

Table Four: Describing the Path: Re-Search Methodology

Aboriginal people themselves approve the research and the research methods	Informal pre-research initial gathering with Indigenous women to discuss re-search ideas and possibilities. Formalized Community Advisory Group of 6 Indigenous women informed development of the search journey, provided guidance along the way. 6 Indigenous and 6 non-Indigenous women participated in Kitchen Table discussions and were asked to provide recommendations as to how the information within the re-search could be shared with community.
A knowledge and consideration of community and the diversity and unique nature that each individual brings to community;	Grounded in Indigenous worldviews, ways of being and knowledge. Two-Eyed Seeing. Cultural Learner. Principles of Storywork – Everyone has a story and wisdom to share.
Ways of relating and acting within community with an understanding of the principles of reciprocity and responsibility;	Existing relational connections and accountability. Face to face meetings. Offering of tobacco and small symbolic gift shared with each community contributor.
Research participants must feel safe and be safe, including respecting issues	Creation of safe and ethical space – meeting where participants feel most comfortable.

of confidentially;	Confidentiality and risk concerns discussed, identified and addressed.
A non-intrusive observation, or quietly aware watching;	Not all who were interested in participating were available as a result of scheduling conflicts or availability. Practice of non-interference, when something that was originally to happen (i.e. a discussion meeting) but was cancelled not pushing but allowing it to work itself out. Belief that all things happen as they are meant to happen – including the concept of time and the length of time that has been taken for this work to be completed.
A deep listening and hearing with more than the ears;	Inspiring and influencing Dream. Re-listening to the discussion recordings as a means of deep learning, opposed to focusing on the written transcripts as the primary source of 'data material'.
A reflection non-judgemental consideration of what is being seen and heard;	The title of this work has changed many times over based on the different discussions and learning. Again, about honouring the journey, not getting stuck on the required outcome(s).
Having learnt from the listening a purposeful plan to act with actions informed by learning, wisdom, and acquired knowledge;	The learnings of this journey have been life changing for me and has/will continue to be interwoven and mobilized into who I am as a helper and all that I do. I will discuss this later in the paper.
Responsibility to act with fidelity in relationship to what has been heard, observed, and learnt;	All participants have opportunity to review transcripts, will receive copy of the report and provided update as to how the findings will be shared. There will be a 'giving back' of this work. Each community contributor was asked for guidance of how this could be done.
Listening and observing the self as well as in relationship to others;	This work is impossible to do without self-reflection, growth, healing, resistance, resilience, development and most important, relational connections.
Acknowledgement that the researcher brings to the research his or her subjective self (Wilson, 2008, p. 59).	As I have mentioned, I have by no means been impartial or objective within this process. This work is closely connected to my heart as are the participants that have shared space along the path with me.

Based on this snap-shot, I turn to you, the reader to humbly ask if you think the journey and path has worked within an Indigenous research paradigm? As I mentioned, the reality is I am a Settler and it's not a matter of 'if colonial ways of doing surface, it's a matter of when and how': how has the 'colonial status quo and practices found its way into this search, and how could it have been done differently?

Remembering that the purpose of this project is to identify key elements and strategies that provide insight and tools for non-Indigenous people interested in working with Indigenous communities in learning how to share space along a path forward that will best support the relationships needed to create a new future over the next 150 years, what were some key 'take away(s)' of how this journey was conducted that may be helpful working within alliances?

Before you answer that, let's continue on.

Chapter Four: Sense-Making

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to share the experience and knowledge gathered from the Advisory Group and participants during the Kitchen Table discussions. Those gatherings focused on knowledge sharing around key elements related to building Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships and attempted to make sense of the learning along the re-search journey. To achieve this, the chapter is broken into three sections. The first section tries to capture the knowledge and experiences of the women without questioning or expanding on comments with my own meaning or analysis but with connection to key themes. The second section dives deeper into discussion on the primary themes and observations from the experience practiced within this re-search. The final section offers a summary linking the key concepts identified throughout the discussions that will be further discussed in the following chapter. Just as a reminder, there will be a combined use of direct quotes and combined quotes without identifying names. This combined approach was to support preferences of participants and reduction of risk for misinterpretation of experiences if read/taken out of context.

Section One: Key Themes, Community Experience and Knowledge Sharing

The Kitchen Table discussions offered space and opportunity for participating Indigenous and non-Indigenous women to step back from their work as providers, activists, participants, leaders, helpers and peace builders (among the many other roles they hold) to join in conversation about working in partnerships. It was believed that everyone in discussion held knowledge we could learn from and that each person's

perspective and sharing was rooted in their worldview, values, and life experiences. Their reality is neither right nor wrong, but valued and accepted as legitimate knowledge because it reflects their individual experiences. The goal of this section is to identify the key themes that emerged from the different discussions. They fell within 3 subject groupings: 1) importance of relationships; 2) Relationship Barriers; and 3) Key Elements that Build, Nurture, and Maintain Relationships within Collaborative Alliances.

Importance of Relationships: According to the Canadian Oxford Dictionary[30], relationship can be defined as "the way in which two or more people or groups regard and behave towards each other." As we have discussed, there has been a long history of negative Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships in Canada resulting from how each group regards and behave towards each other. For example, there was clear and intentional effort by the Canadian government to 'remove the Indian out of the child' and to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada[31] using systems such as residential schools. More recently, each group has become so deeply rooted in colonial history that one could argue a culture of violence influences Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations resulting in higher rates of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, incarceration rates, epidemic rates of suicide and chronic health issues of Indigenous compared to non-Indigenous Peoples.

The importance of relationships has been a consistent theme throughout this re-search, even before it started. The importance of relationships is within itself a key element that requires attention and critical reflection as the foundation of any work with

[30] https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/relationship

[31] Minister Duncan Campbell Scott, Minister of Indian Affairs between 1893 and 1932 is quoted to say "Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015b; First Nations Child & Family Caring Society, 2016)

Indigenous and non-Indigenous efforts. This project for example, included a Community Advisory Group made up of 6 Indigenous women ranging in age from youth to Grandmothers, 6 Indigenous women and 6 non-Indigenous women for a total of 18. Although from different communities and leadership positions, the common thread shared among all the women, were that each actively carry an important role within their families and communities having considerable experience working within decolonizing relationships and collaborative alliances.

There was a genuine willingness by all participants to be involved in this research. The Kitchen Table discussions were very reflective in nature sharing stories as part of the process of answering the guiding questions. Each person that agreed to participate had a pre-existing relational connection with the lead researcher and/or member of the Community Advisory Group that helped to provide a safe and reflective space for discussion.

It could be argued that this previously existing relational connection with the search community might be inappropriate because, as Hopkins (2012) explains, the Western science model considers empathetic attunement inappropriate for empirical research. However, when considering the focus and purpose of this search, the reality is that relationship is a key concept within Indigenous approaches (Hart, 2009). Grandmother Linda further emphasizes:

> Relationships come into play every moment of every day, absolutely every moment. Our whole life depends on relationships. That is the most important part of peaceful decolonizing partnerships, relationships.

Grandmother Linda's comment not only re-emphasizes the role of relationships within Indigenous approaches, but also further speaks to the complexity of interconnectedness and responsibility to those relationships as held from an Indigenous lens.

Entering into relation/alliances with groups approaching the work from a different lens than a mainstream settler colonial conception can have a significant impact a person's overall experience, which in turn can impact on their sense of feeling welcome and openness to engage and/or participate. For example, Ko'ona explains her experience while attending mainstream meetings grounded and facilitated from a different perspective and worldview than her own:

> Everything is so compartmentalized. You're not allowed to feel, not allowed to have any spirit in life. It's just more all about facts and results…no heart connection. That's where many of us get into trouble, we wear our hearts on our sleeves…it's like we've forgotten how to be in relation.

Ko'ona's experience is not solely her own. Throughout discussions many participants, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous spoke to how they witnessed and experienced a dis-connect with regards to how people interacted, not spending time to connect focusing solely on actionable tasks and working towards outcomes as opposed to the process of engagement.

Having worked within both Indigenous and mainstream agencies I have experienced this as well. When working at Ka Ni Kanichihk for example, all meetings, programs, classes or gatherings are started with at minimum a smudge and opening prayer with Elders and Traditional Teachers always available to help provide teachings and guidance. There is also much laughter and a recognition that all who attend bring gifts, unique strengths and skills with less of a focus on job titles or hierarchical roles.

Culture, Indigenous worldview, values and relationships were grounding and guiding elements that centered everything. This is in complete contrast with experiences I have had working within mainstream systems such as government and non-profit agencies where the grounding and guiding elements seem to be more reflective of settler colonial Western-based worldviews that hold values such as hierarchical roles, mandates, individualism, and targeted outcomes are prioritized. This divide in value sets ultimately influences and impacts how relationships are viewed, valued, and how approaches to collaborative work are informed.

To use this project as a further example, let's imagine that I had no pre-existing relationship with the participants of the project, chose not to use a Community Advisory group and was a visitor to the area with no previous connections within community. It wouldn't be different than any other research projects where a settler flies into a community, extracts knowledge, and flies out copyrighting the knowledge as their own and not maintain a relationship with participants beyond the project. Depending on the intent of the project, perhaps this is all that may have been needed. However, for a project that was specifically focused on learning key elements that support Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships, it would seem counter-productive to not invest and center the work in relationship-based values, worldviews and practices.

Take a moment and reflect on your own experience. Have you ever attended a meeting where you dreaded attending? Why was that? What were the factors impacting your experience? Was the focus and intention of the work grounded and guided by building and maintaining trusting relationships or on achieving specific tasks and/or outcomes? If time and energy was spent on the importance of building relationships

within the group and with the work that was being done, would your experience have been any different?

How we engage in relationship is vital. Commitment is needed to invest in acknowledging and caring to best support working together in unity. To help capture the essence of this, Sylvia utilized the metaphor of a three-legged race:

> Have to learn to walk together—move together, work together, and co-operate together—in order to create movement together. If we aren't working together, we are working against each other and stepping out of stride. If one lags behind we have to be there to support.

It would seem that if relationships are not held at the center of collaborative alliances, nor given the necessary care and attention to support everyone in walking together to gain momentum, as in a three-legged race, efforts could end up working against themselves and momentum could never be achieved. Have you ever been in a three-legged race where your partner had their own agenda and plan to reach the goal of crossing the finish line? The result isn't positive. People can get hurt. It's de-structive and works against gaining any form of momentum or success. There may be small 'wins', but full potential can never be realized.

Gladys further emphasizes the essence of why building relationship is so important:

> In the last two years there has been much, much more awareness in media and community and universities and high schools about indigenous Peoples in Canada and the kind of opportunities for working towards a better relationship and for working toward a better partnership, and to try to address some of the inequalities and the impact that previous legislation and current legislation and all of those things have created.
>
> We are living in a reality today, and we need to understand how we have gotten here and make a commitment to do better. And so I think we're getting there. And I think getting there in terms of more and more

> conversations are being had and so opportunities for building relationships are there more than I've seen when I first moved back here in 2007.
>
> There needs to be a relationship that's formed in order to do work in a meaningful way that isn't harmful.

If a starting point is a commitment to holding relationship at the core this can then become a pillar for guiding a path forward. Part of this work is ensuring relationships are being built from a place of revolutionary leadership and praxis (Freire, 2010) where the focus is on the need for critical reflection and inclusive action. Within Canada, as you will recall from earlier discussion, for this to be achieved there must be an acknowledgement of the role and impacts of colonization and a commitment to decolonization.

Impacts and Barriers to Relationships: One of the greatest impacts on relationship building that was commonly recognized, named and embedded in each discussion was colonization - not from a mere intellectual perspective, but from an all-encompassing place. As Sheryl described

> There is so much about relationships at all levels that are colonized, it is really hard to get away from it.

Further to this, Grandmother Mary Anne speaks even more to the impacts of colonization:

> Colonization isn't just to people, it's to the land as well. And that is something we do share, you know, and that is something that we can work on together even if it is from slightly different or very different perspectives. For better or for worse, we are all living on this land together right now. So what the hell are we going to do about it?

Colonization impacts everyone in different ways, on different levels—which ultimately impacts relationships in different ways, on different levels. Based on this common

interwoven thread throughout discussions, it is unquestionably evident that it would merely be a perpetuated (harmful) act of colonization to discuss key elements of building collaborative alliances within a Canadian context without the acknowledgement of colonization. Ko'ona shares:

> If we can't acknowledge and respect the harms of the past we aren't going anywhere.

Considering the group of women who participated within this project and knowing their backgrounds, awareness of colonization, and commitment to decolonization, this was not surprising. I almost took it for granted and missed its relevance until one day I was sitting in a meeting with a number of representatives from various mainstream cross sectoral agencies with a clear absence of Indigenous presence when I began to wonder: if I were to ask the people around this table what role colonization and decolonization play in building collaborative alliances, would they be aware of its impact on the work we do in mainstream agencies? I can only speculate, however, I would suspect, based on observation (language usage, colonial-based systemic status quo, etc), and the absence of Indigenous presence and voice, what the outcome would have been. This is something possibly to further investigate in the future.

In discussing colonization, there was an equally common pattern of emphasis within discussions around decolonization and its important role in building collaborative alliances. Again, it wasn't merely from an intellectual level, but active and necessary for everyone to commit to. As Grandmother Roxanne explains:

> Not just Aboriginal people have to be decolonized. All people have to be decolonized. All of society needs to be decolonized.
> Same as reconciliation. Reconciliation is not about two or three groups of people, it's about reconciliation within ourselves: Part of our role as Aboriginal people in the seventh generation.

> Not only are we waking up, we are also helping other people around us wake up because they too have been colonized for longer than us as Aboriginal people.

When asked about what decolonizing relationships look like, Monique explained:

> There is no one living here today that has experience in living in a decolonized Canada or an uncolonized Canada. We don't really know.
>
> I think we can guess at what that might look like. I am a planner, so the way I plan things or the way I try and think of things is like either what is the end goal and sort of work backward toward it. But this is hard because I don't know what the end goal looks like.
>
> But I do know or have more of a sense of what a colonized Canadian space looks like, what a colonized Winnipeg looks like, and the characteristics of that situation and what the people who colonized Canada, the value system that they brought over. So learning about them - of course. But learning about that first so that you have a decent grasp of that, right?
>
> So the only way that I have been able to wrap my head around how to do 'decolonized' work is to just sort of in all ways, just doing the opposite of all those things.

As Monique suggested, it's hard to truly know what decolonization means, and more importantly looks like within a Canada that continues to be a colonial state.

> Grandmother Linda also shared:
>
> Don't think we do know what decolonizing really is. We can't go back to the way it was before. Everything has moved and changed.
>
> People have so much diversity. There are many people that feel like they don't belong. People spend a lot of time trying to find a place where they belong. Decolonizing shouldn't be working harder to the 'the same as," but about women finding their voices, reclaiming their power and identities. It's hard work, a hard concept. Colonization affects the whole body, psyche, and emotions.

A common thread through the discussions on decolonization seems to be how it is hard work and how it needs a daily commitment to action that un-colonizes mind, body, and spirit. Monique further emphases how this is not easy work:

> Sometimes we just keep doing and filling our time with the doing (donating, showing up for meetings, pushing connections, doing, doing, doing—more ego- driven than authentic. Hyper-ego-driven accomplishment things.
>
> Need to be reflective and focus not on the doing but on connecting with people and building relationships.

Sheryl further adds advice for non-Indigenous people who want to learn to decolonize themselves:

> The very first thing is get comfortable with being uncomfortable. You have to put yourself in situations where you don't know what you're doing, you don't know what's going on, and could make mistakes—the imminent feeling that 'I could make mistakes here.' And you will. And you have to be okay with making mistakes.
>
> You'll get laughed at sometimes; you'll get shunned sometimes, a little bit. You'll have to go through a lot of emotions. But you will also be embraced.
>
> You will get to be a more whole human being. You'll get invited into community spaces that you have never been before. You get to meet some honourable people. So, that being uncomfortable would be something worthwhile.

As suggested above, being committed to decolonizing is often hard and uncomfortable work. People often find themselves in situations they have never experienced before and feel a sense of vulnerability. With this vulnerability comes a sense of discomfort. As humans, it's often in our nature to avoid things that make us uncomfortable, but in working on decolonizing oneself, this discomfort is a key element that must be embraced and not avoided.

One of the participants shared an experience when they were instructing undergraduate university students in an Aboriginal social work course and some students had not heard of residential schools. A component of the course included a of

Canadian history with a focus on colonization and the many impacts on Indigenous Peoples not from the typical perspective presented within western-based text book, but from an Indigenous perspective. There was often a lot of push back from students, including charged feelings of anger, frustration, discomfort, and disbelief. As an Indigenous person and teacher of the class, part of building that relationship was to be okay sitting in that for a while and creating a space where they could have uncomfortable conversations, to ask questions that might not be okay in other settings.

Some people in the class were able to find the courage to be in that uncomfortableness, while others reacted from a defensive place and chose to leave the class. The Kitchen Table participant admitted it was challenging not to internalize the students' reactions personally and had to do a lot of her own work to process the situation. Absolon (2011) explains for Indigenous Peoples "decolonizing is arduous work and full of contradictions. At a personal level decolonization means examining the inherent conflicts within myself: I am Anishinaabe and English. I am decolonizing in a colonial education system and am doing so in English, the colonizers' language" (p. 19). Further to this, Vanessa shares what decolonizing looks like for her on a personal level as an Indigenous women:

> I know I am colonized. But in terms of how I conduct myself, there's a big difference of when you're conducting yourself in a non-colonized way than how you live. I live a colonized life, but I conduct myself in a non-colonized way. I just, know that I'm talking out loud about it, it's different.

When further asked, Vanessa explained that living a colonized life in a non-colonized way is hard to put into words but is an example of how Indigenous culture is not something a person does, like going to church on Sundays and reading from a book. It is a lifestyle that centers on continuous learning and living within a deep sense of

interconnectedness, a daily practice of ways of being that incorporates spirit, mind, emotion and physical elements in all that she does and who she is.

Within a larger context, decolonization work for larger mainstream organizations is a bit harder than the personal, Monique suggests:

> I think doing less harm is fairly huge. It is sad that it is huge, but I think that is the reality. It's important to not just push forward without considering all forms of oppression.

At political levels, the TRC recommendations certainly provide guidance into how systemic decolonization can begin to occur and become more prominent within our Canadian state. It's not easy, but it's necessary work that everyone (at multiple levels of society) must fully encompass beyond an intellectual concept. We must commit to identifying strategies to embrace and mobilize within all that we do in order for collaborative alliances to have any hope of succeeding.

As was discussed previously, colonization and decolonization are huge concepts that have multiple layers of complexity. They play a foundational role in building collaborative alliances. However, they don't necessarily reveal some of the more hands on contextual elements that play a key role in the success or failure of collaborative alliances. For example, because of the legacy of colonization, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants identified fear, mistrust, trauma, anger, and physical/emotional space as barriers to support genuine and authentic engagement within collaborative alliances. When people are coming from a place of hurt or trauma, there is a normal and natural human reaction of fear and mistrust making it challenging to build momentum. Various participants shared their insights on impacts of hurt and trauma:

> There is an instilled fear because of historical colonization—when someone is in a place of fear they are not themselves.

> If someone is at that place where they are not trusting, it is going to take time. A part of that relationship now becomes a part of building that trust and so the expectations even though at the end of the day you have a job to do and you have a project to run, it can't be about that. Your successes have to be about the group and the people you are working with.
>
> There is also the fear of those who want to help, but are in fear of not knowing what to do, not wanting to perpetuate the cycles of colonization, traumatization, oppression.
>
> Sometimes there's so much anger and animosity in community, I struggle to want to go out. I find myself isolating myself, and doing my own thing because when I come home from some community events I just feel sick and start questioning and doubting myself. It just feels so unsafe sometimes.
>
> I have done it, creating road blocks because of whatever it was or a perception I had or a judgement and realizing afterward that 'holy crap'—and that really prevented me from having a relationship with this person and it would have been a really good partnership or whatever.
>
> As a non-Indigenous person I carry guilt of the trauma and hurt that my forefathers have contributed to and have had to do a lot of my own work to come to a place where I'm not triggered or fuel other Peoples trauma and hurt. It's not easy work; it's very hard really, and it never really ends.

Although not always known or acknowledged, this hurt and trauma can result in a lot of anger that people carry; Anger with life, with the violence, with so much negativity, and not enough positive-ness. Wendy shared:

> I see obstacles and that happening because when people feel shitty about themselves, they fall. I see this with young people, not necessarily older people, where they are like, I am just nobody now. They told me that.
>
> I say, 'well not necessarily. You're still growing. As long as you know where you come from, you are a person, [you can get] back up.

Similarly, other participants suggest:

> I practice cultural ways, I practice living a good life each day. But because it's not seen as Traditional or done in a certain way, I don't feel

> safe with and in certain Aboriginal groups. Because I'm not against something, I'm labeled as a 'sell out.'
>
> I'm not involved as I used to be. I don't feel safe. It's just easier to not engage. But even then, my choices are judged.

The different experiences that contribute to the examples of barriers shared ultimately impact a person's sense of engagement, connection, and safety within a collaborative partnership or interaction.

I often think back to that meeting I had referred to earlier (page 106) where I was sitting with representatives from mainstream agencies and no presence of the Indigenous agencies at the table and wonder why Indigenous groups where not there? Was it because it was not something that aligned with work they are doing? Where they even invited? Or had they chosen not to engage because it was potentially another oppressive scenario that did not feel safe enough to continue being involved? Such reflection is supported and encouraged by Ko'ona who spoke to the importance of being reflective if people choose not to participate in gatherings:

> If someone chooses not to engage for different reasons, still reflect on this— have the commitment and the openness to reflect on what was happening there and how you could learn from that.

If people/groups are not at the table, there is a response-ability to not pass assumptions or judgements from your own perspective as to why, but to better understand why. Perhaps they had not been invited? Perhaps there are dynamics and/or conditions that might be influencing choice/ability to attend/not attend?

Some of the barriers identified by the non-Indigenous participants in this project work included privilege, guilt, brokenness, perspective, and identity. Privilege was seen as a barrier because of how non-Indigenous people were *unaware* of the role it played

in relationships. Contributing non-Indigenous participants identified the *awareness of* their privilege as a potential barrier leading to other barriers such as guilt, brokenness, and perspective. This indicates that whether someone is aware of their privilege of not, it poses a potential barrier that may also create related barriers.

In one of the Kitchen Table discussions, for example, the group discussion highlighted how awareness of privilege, guilt, brokenness, and identity can create barriers that become paralyzing and hard to navigate, what Smith (1999) refers to as 'complicated inside/outside relations'. To help further explain inside/outside relations from a non-Indigenous perspective Christy, Laura, and Mary Anne shared, their voices mixed below:

> Sometimes you can get paralyzed in privilege and knowledge because it's like, 'Frig, how is it that I get all this even if I don't want it?' It's yours whether I like it or not.
>
> One of the things that terrified me about awareness, about sort of just understanding the differences of our experience of the world, was just that— knowledge is amazing, but it also drives a bit of a wedge that I end up putting in there.
>
> Like me and all my siblings. We are like brothers and sisters. We just adored each other. But now it's become, 'I get all this privilege, and you don't have access to it.' And I hate myself, and feel like I can't relate to you. And I feel that if I try to relate to you, I'm being horrible and I don't know how to.
>
> So I think that is also where I'm coming from because I am suddenly having to re-navigate my family. And it's how to do that in a productive way and not get paralyzed and stuck.
>
> When you are physically present—however comfortable or uncomfortable it might be sometimes—there is that possibility for surprise and connection and hurt, too.
>
> What an honour it is to have those who draw us—again, that healing—to have those who draw us privileged ones into community, into the physical spaces even though it is hard just to be there physically. And so

> it was embracing a lot of awkward moments, a lot of awkward silences and sitting.
>
> I think a key thing for me is sort of being comfortable with myself so I am not trying to search for something in another and sort of making my growth contingent on their experience, you know. Just that extractive sort of approach to things – eating the other – yeah, trying to be hyper aware that is something we tend to go towards.
>
> When I walk around wrapped with guilt it almost takes the Agency away from the person I am in the relationship with. Guilt. (A) It's incredibly self-absorbing, but (B) it's also sort of taking away their power in the relationship too.
>
> I entered relationships out of guilt and just trying to give and give. But only when I broke, and it started to become reciprocal, and I started to realize that— whether or not it was acceptable—I had to be who I was.

Arlene and Maxine shared an observation they had experienced, from an Indigenous perspective, with regards to guilt and paralysis when working with communities:

> There's a hesitation, rooted in guilt—paralysis out of fear of not wanting to cause harm, not knowing protocols, and a hesitation to step into the circle.
>
> It's like a 'pink elephant.' Have to have courage to address/identify what you think is an issue or addressing what you don't know.

The women shared different examples of where they had known people who wanted to offer support and become involved in different cultural events, but in the end, ended up not engaging. When asked why, they reported not wanting to impose, didn't know how or where to start, and didn't want to offend anyone. Similarly, there was another example of how a family was intrigued with work that was being done with a grassroots group focused on searching for stolen relations. This family also had a missing loved one but was not Indigenous and had assumed the work of the group was only by and for Indigenous people. Opposed to remaining in a place of paralysis and assumption, the family reached out to the coordinator and engaged in courageous conversation. The

family has joined the group and became active volunteers. This example offers an interesting insight in that how we choose to understand and/or approach barriers will directly impact experiences. If barriers, whether it be fear, assumptions or conflict, were approached not as roadblocks but as opportunities to work beyond, the path of that relationship would/could be very different.

One of the important things to remember when considering the different barriers that influence relationships is that everyone has a story, a story that has history, trauma, and locational perspectives and meaning. This story is carried into every encounter whether with family, friends, work, or community. This story has a tremendous influence and impact on a person's openness, availability, and patterns when engaging. Within this story a person also carries gifts, strengths, and experiences that are valuable and can add important contributions. Throughout the discussions along the path of this re-search, there has been plenty of reflective sharing on how many different barriers such as trauma, fear, mistrust, guilt, privilege, and brokenness can impact a person's perspective and identity and block efforts to build and work within collaborative alliances. However, just as there are barriers, there are also many key elements that help to build, nurture and maintain healthy collaborative alliances.

Section Two: Key Elements that Build, Nurture, and Maintain Relationships within Collaborative Alliances

Key elements can be anything from perspective to reflective action within praxis. Throughout conversations with participants there were a number of key elements that were consistently identified as vital to building, nurturing and maintaining relationships

within collaborative alliances. This section highlights the nine themes that emerged including: locating self, being prepared for conflict before it happens, guiding principles, ethical and safe space, getting comfortable with uncomfortable conversations and experiences, commitment and time, deep listening, the power and importance of language, and commitment to reflective learning.

Locating Self: One of the most emphasized key elements was related to locating self: it's important for everyone within a newly forming relationship to locate them-selves. Ko'ona, for example, shared that locating and introducing yourself when you meet people is also a way of helping to build understanding of where (physically and culturally) you are coming from:

> We need to understand where each of us are from. Then we can relate more with people. When I introduce myself, I share where I am from, my family, my clan—. If you know my clan, you can know where my mindset is from and how I process information. [When we introduce ourselves], then we can acknowledge one another, respect one another, and understand where each other comes from.

Wendy also spoke to how it's important to have a type of 'orientation' when a person is entering a group or partnership:

> You know, when you go on a date, two people, you introduce yourself because you want that relationship to work.
>
> I think in partnerships you need to do that. You owe it to the person who is coming into the partnership to provide a little orientation of what our vision is. And then the other person needs to orient themselves, too.
>
> People need to orient themselves so that they have a better [experience].

On an organizational level, Monique shared it's important to ask:

> Why are we offering our help here? Is it a reputation thing? Is it that we want to be seen to be on the list of partners or donors or whatever it is? Is it because we think we can learn something from it? Which? I really think it's a good idea to step back and say, "Why are we doing this? Are we doing this for the ego of the organization so to speak? Or, are we doing it because we have a relationship here? Or because we have the beginnings of maybe a relationship and we are wanted?

By being able to reflect on the answers to some of the questions posed by Monique organizations can be able to articulate their location and purpose for wanting to engage in building a relationship and becoming part of a (the) collaborative alliance. This initial location and positioning helps to provide an orientation and awareness that could in turn help reduce fear, build trust, and lead to the development of a safe space.

Being Prepared for Conflict Before it Happens: If locating self is an important initial element of building relationships, then another critical key element identified by everyone is having a plan to deal with and manage conflict. Relationships have conflict. When more than two people get together, it's not a matter of *if* a conflict arises; it's a matter of *when*. Conflict can be a very positive thing, but it depends on how those in relationship manage it. Grandmother Roxanne explains:

> The biggest thing to building anything is the understanding that when two or more people coming together to build, partner, whatever—even if they see the same vision, even if they are coming from the same culture—there's going to be conflict, and to just recognize that and accept it.
>
> You either will get stuck in it and muck it up, or recognize it for what it is. Then make a decision, 'Can I live with this?' If you can't, you'll have to step back and step out or will end up stalling the partnership.

Ko'ona shared an example of one of her favorite groups she had been involved with. The reason she loved it so much was because it functioned very well. It functioned well

because of mutual respect, mutual faith, and mutual understanding with a willingness to help one another:

> Every time there was conflict that was not serving the circle, or the energy went screwy, we would stop, pray, and ask for guidance.
>
> We would pray from a Christian way, and we would smudge. Two ways existing together.

Maxine and Arlene further shared:

> There is always going to be conflict – it's how that conflict is managed that will be the difference, that makes the difference.

Having a discussion of how conflict will be managed early in the relationship is important and a key element in ensuring there is a plan for when it does arise.

Guiding Principles: Finding Common Ground: Another defined key element was the role of respect. One of the Seven Sacred Teachings[32], respect, is a value that is action-based. Some of the points shared by the Community Collaborators around respect include:

> Having the respect to say what's going on, to talk about issues as they arise, that they exist. It's unhealthy when you just shut down and refuse to discuss or address issues.
>
> There has to be a mutual respect. That's a big one.
>
> When you walk into a room you have to be respectful to those people. Because you are a different person, I am not going to force them to change their whole world because I am there. They need to be respectful to me because I am kind of different.
>
> So that's what needs to happen—more of a respectful shift going into non- Indigenous and people coming into Indigenous communities is that

[32] The Seven Sacred Teachings speak to respect, wisdom, honesty, humility courage, love and truth. If interested in learning more about them, readers are encouraged to seek out an Elder or Traditional Teacher that carries these teachings, honour the appropriate protocol of the area you are in (i.e. offer tobacco) and be open to learning.

is more of an understanding of your environment that you are walking into.

I tell people whenever they are going to another territory, ask the person, an Elder, or the person in charge, “what are the protocols?” And they will respect you more for asking what the protocols are. And the person will appreciate knowing this before they make little mistakes. And they feel more like they can participate.

When I hear Elders talk about how God-Creator are love and don’t put down my beliefs, I know they know. But even though I am Aboriginal and when I hear Elders put down God and my beliefs, How can they truly embrace respect, love and acceptance when they are condemning another?

I think the simplest thing is to try and teach each other to respect one another. And that’s like you said—communicating and having food. I really am a strong believer in breaking bread together and come out with honesty and ask what do you want out of my partnership?

You have to look for something in each person to respect. If we don’t bother to look [for another’s gifts], then we are always thinking that I am more superior.

So you have to teach that group and you have to teach your allies: What do you see in me? What do you think my gifts are? And force them to look at every person. Do we have a mutual understanding of our goals, vision, and purpose and see what their gifts are?

I always ask a lot of questions: What do <u>you</u> do? And everyone kind of looks at me. And I say, ‘I would rather learn what you are doing than me imposing on you what I know on to you.’

It’s action-based. You can’t just say, “Okay, we’re all going to just sit here in a respectful trustful way.”

I was in a meeting not long ago. Respect and trust was in the ‘terms of reference’ of this group. But the behaviours and treatment happening in the group were not aligned with respect or trust.

> Respect is a universal teaching of all societies. Yet it often doesn't get put into practice. Respecting that everyone, everyone, has something to contribute.
>
> There's a void in society today—that genuine relationship connection. Everything is just facts. Not allowed to feel.
>
> I really like that idea, but its action-based. I mean how many people talk the talk? But when it comes to seeing beyond the words, there is such a disconnect sometimes with some folks.

Related to these comments is an observation shared by Maxine and Arlene:

> It's okay to be different to be together…have to respect that we are all different.

Further to this, Grandmother Velma added:

> If we can respect the importance of spirituality, we should be able to find it within to respect others beliefs and choices. Respect is the key. Not just in words, but also in how you act.

As the discussions indicate, respect within this context is a verb as opposed to a noun, meaning it necessitates 'walking the talk.' This remained consistent with the other values identified as important key elements required in building collaborative alliances in addition to respect. These important values included: 1) Trust; 2) Honesty; 3) Humility; 4) Reciprocity and sharing; 5) Courage; 6) Truth; 7) Authenticity; 8) Love/care.

Ethical and Safe Space: Other key elements identified through the different Kitchen Table Discussions were more 'process' related. For example, everyone spoke to how important it was to create space in which people felt physically comfortable. Where people gather and meet should be considered just as important as what will be on the agenda for discussion. A very vivid memory on this point is a project I had completed in my social work undergrad program that focused on analyzing the physical

spaces of an Indigenous-based children's aid society in a semi-remote community accessible by train or plane, and an urban mainstream children's aid building. The physical set up of the two office spaces were drastically different. In this case, the Indigenous agency building was open with the secretary available behind the front desk in the front of the office with open hallways to the staff offices. The urban mainstream agency had a small reception area with the secretary and main waiting room behind plexi-glass and locked doors. The first office felt welcoming and inviting, whereas the second office felt rigid, closed, authoritative and controlling. Physical space can be a triggering element that impacts relationships before they even begin and is worth consideration in planning and preparation of any and all meetings regardless of how big or small.

Getting Comfortable with Uncomfortable Conversations and Experiences:

Unrelated to physical space, but related to creating space, is creating safety between and across individuals and groups that supports and encourages permission for people to have difficult conversations without judgment. A big part of helping to facilitate this is creating opportunities for people to connect on a personal level and intentionally working towards building trust rather than assuming trust will be included from the beginning. Embracing humility and vulnerability are vital for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples. This includes questioning personal biases and assumptions, having the courage to own mistakes and errors, and being truthful of the impacts of behaviours and actions. Linda M shared an analogy that is helpful to put into perspective how uncomfortable things can be when people or groups first get together:

> In those first few meetings when people agree to gather it's like being put into a dark room, with no instruction yet told that our job is to find our way out. In our efforts to find our way, it will at times be awkward, frustrating and, inevitably, will end up touching each other in very uncomfortable ways.

By paying attention to the physical and emotional space, navigating through those uncomfortable conversations, and reflecting on hesitations to engage reduces the real and/or perceived risks collaborators may feel.

Commitment and Time: Building healthy relationships is a process that takes time. In order to prioritize relationships, it requires a commitment to the process over outcomes. Vanessa maintains:

> In today's society, there is such pressure to produce outcomes versus taking the time required to build trusting relationships first and seeing where that leads, see what it could look like. This takes a lot of time.

Time was a key variable that was mentioned a number of times throughout the discussions. For participants this meant ensuring process is as important, if not more important, than outcomes. Gladys explains her experience when facilitating time limited grant funded programs in community:

> I found that actually quite often in the projects—because at the end of the project you are just getting to where you need to get and then it's done. The funding is done.

Within mainstream society, outcomes/deliverables within a set timeframe is the expectation. The challenge to this however is the need to build, and often reconnect relationships in communities before working towards achieving the newly defined outcomes. Building and/or re-building relationships takes time thereby making time itself an essential key element.

Deep Listening: Two other key processes identified were deep listening and reflective learning to support perspective shifts. Wendy shared a story of how deep listening and reflective learning within safe conversation can help support growth, healing and awareness:

> I have a friend that is a different religion than me. We use to go on road trips and we would talk about different scriptures from the Bible and unpacking our different perspectives on it.
>
> When I would explain my perspective, instead of reacting to it, she would often just say, 'I never thought of it in that way.'
>
> Over time I noticed that it helped me process my triggers with the church. When I once find myself reacting to hearing about anything about the church, I noticed that with my new awareness I wasn't reacting as much.

Similarly, Grandmother Velma speaks about when she hosts a circle at Riverview Health Centre Long Term Care each week. She provides space and opportunity for the group to dialogue and share with each other:

> Now we are starting to talk about our faith. One of the ladies, she is 105, and she wanted to talk about our faith because we talk about everything else but our faith. So we talked about that last week. Then next time we're going to do the similarities between the Seven Sacred Teachings and the Ten Commandments. One fellow, he is 90, and he started doing poetry and sharing that. And then we also have tea after they really enjoy that.

This example offers an illustration of how two groups of people can come together and, in a safe space, have dialogue that can shift perspective threw deep listening and openness to learn and share. A part of this is the action of courage. To step into such dialogue, one must embrace and mobilize the values of courage from a genuinely humbled heart. Once within these conversations, the use of appropriate language, another key process, becomes a critical factor.

The Power and Importance of Language: Language is powerful. It is a key process for two different reasons; first, cultural language holds within it the worldviews of a culture and knowledge system. Colonialism attempted to completely wipe out Indigenous languages and although there are some languages at risk, thankfully, all have not been lost. Second, it has the power to either hurt or heal. As such, in building collaborative alliances, it is essential language is given attention and used mindfully. Although this topic within itself could be the entire focus of a thesis, some of the key points identified within our discussions include loss of meaning in translation, word play for greater meaning, and the danger of buzzwords.

Loss of meaning in translation: There is a significant difference between Indigenous and Western languages. Indigenous language is verb based, action oriented, whereas English is noun based and descriptive. Some words cannot be translated in both languages, without completely losing their contextual meaning which makes it challenging to communicate and guarantee full understanding. For example, Wendy explains

> When someone translates Indigenous language, the meanings get lost even with our own Elders to youth. Meanings get lost in translations.
>
> How do I, as English-speaking First Nation's woman, translate the purpose of our project through our language? How do I do that? So that is something that we are trying to figure out right now. And I think that language piece is a big, big piece.

When using English as the dominant language of communication, meaning is lost that would otherwise be present if traditional language could be used. Indigenous languages have been at risk of being lost, however they are being awoken again in

many communities through language classes in schools and communities. The value in the reclamation of Indigenous languages is also supporting reclamation of culture, identity and meaning. As non-Indigenous Peoples it is important to be mindful that the use of the English language is limiting. When working with Indigenous groups every effort must be made to find the most appropriate words that ensure a connection to meaning within the Indigenous language and messaging used.

Word-play for greater meaning: With this said, it is possible to creatively play with the spelling and structure of words to help create greater, more relevant meaning. With this writing for example, a conscious effort has been made to change different English words to help change its orientation and context. The word ‘remember’, for example, became re-member. The difference, although subtle, switches the meaning from a noun related to cognitively remembering something to a verb or action-based word that implies to put something back together; to re – member one of the poles of the tipi we talked about earlier. This play with words helps to open a whole new opportunity to not only create more meaning, but to also challenge our thinking, assumptions, biases and perspectives. Other wordplay examples include comm-UNITY and response-ABILITY. By purposefully playing with the structure of words we can help create greater meaning while shifting awareness of how and what word is held important.

Danger of buzzwords: There was a lot of discussion throughout the different Kitchen Tables on how some words become popular and become ‘buzzwords’ that everyone uses yet the meaning of them is loaded with assumption, entitlement or even confusion as to what it really means. Let’s look at the word “ally” for example. The word

itself was undeniably and unanimously looked upon negatively by participants who reported that they didn't have a 'good feeling' about the word, yet it is a very commonly used word. It was shared that a lot of people wear the word ally like a 'badge', or use it as another 'title'. There exists a disconnect with the meaning and behaviour(s) of some people. When asked the question, "What does the word 'ally' mean to you?" some of the responses included:

> The term ally sits uncomfortable with me. I think because it sort of separates people. I use it because people know what it means. But I don't know. It doesn't feel like it describes who I am and what I do.
>
> We have folks that kind of wear "ally" like a badge or a title.
>
> That's part of the Canadian identity, right? Wanting to be like a peacekeeper or the ally—'I'm so good.' I think that method needs to be exploded immediately and that badge taken away.
>
> Often, people are open with sharing about all these great events that are happening and in fact, when presented with the work, shies away from it.
>
> Don't wear the "Ally Badge"!!
>
> "Ally" is an English word, why should I impose the word "ally" on friends who speak their own language?
>
> When I hear "ally," it sounds so paternalistic. And I hear it sort of like this intentional thing that you do—"I am going to be an ally." It feels like a political stance to take on the role of an ally—more like a title.
>
> I never thought of it until now but it comes from warfare. The word ally comes from warfare. It automatically assumes that there is a conflict happening.
>
> Ally is a very separating word.

Clearly, the comments all speak to the impact of word usage and meanings people give those terms. Some people may think the term ally is well suited, yet from an alternative perspective it could mean something completely different based on experience with people (positive or negative), or when trying to translate it into an Indigenous language.

Other buzzwords that were discussed included “decolonization” and “Indigenizing,” words we are hearing more of lately yet meanings can often be confused. For example, one of the participants explained that something can be indigenized by an Indigenous person/Peoples but that doesn’t necessarily mean it is decolonizing. For instance, a space in building can be indigenized when all design choices and comments that went into the design are informed by Indigenous Peoples. This is indigenized work. However, it would not make it a decolonized space as it may still reside within a colonial institution and system. Non-indigenous people cannot indigenize anything. Yet, we often hear these words being referred to and don’t take the time to question or become more familiar with their deeper meanings from various perspectives or lenses.

In summary, it was a very clear how important and powerful language can be/is. The mindful and conscious commitment to paying attention to language and its use is an important process of building collaborative alliances.

Commitment to Reflective Learning: The final key process that I’d like to highlight from the search discussions was commitment to reflective learning. This was not talked about as much as it was demonstrated within each of the discussions. Each Community Contributor demonstrated critical reflection and commitment to learning.

This in turn, was also demonstrative of the many key elements they had identified throughout the discussions, such as active modeling of the core values of respect, honesty, humility, trust, courage, vulnerability, love and authenticity. It was also demonstrative of locating self and the importance of creating a safe space.

The reflection throughout this section highlighted the importance of relationships as the foundation to building collaborative alliances, the impacts and barriers on relationships, and the key elements and processes that support building relationships within collaborative alliances. The next chapter will work further with this learning to help create more defined links and sense making with the information shared.

Summary

The previous section highlights key elements and themes identified through the Kitchen Table discussions with the Community Advisory Group and participants. As non-Indigenous settlers it is vital to unsettle ourselves by being critically self-reflective in questioning our own assumptions, biases, worldviews and values. This can be achieved by challenging the systems and structures built on a status quo defined by colonial worldviews, perspectives and values. Holding the priority and process of building relationships at the core of what we do is a key element becoming a type of navigation system. A critical consideration on the path forward is related to perspective and the commitment to ensuring the starting point is solidly grounded within an Indigenous approach. We are in a time of history where things are shifting. Based on a report produced by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, the Indigenous population is increasing thereby accounting for a growing percentage of the

Canadian population (2012). When you openly pay attention to the news and other ever expanding social media feeds, like Facebook and twitter, it's becoming easier to witness (harder to ignore) the resistance and leadership many Indigenous Peoples have always practiced and even more are only now awakening and also becoming "Idle No More". Indigenous Peoples are leading the way to change, leading the way to creating the foundation for a new future. What is our role as settlers? How do we join the different movements without imposing our own belief systems whether we are aware of them or not? Are we allies? Peace builders? Helpers? It can be confusing, overwhelming, and at times - paralyzing with understanding just how to become involved and finding a fit. Grandmother Roxanne shared:

> The best ally is someone with no ego. Because you can have a dozen people see the vision, but if egos are trying to drive it, it won't happen. Even as an ally myself, to support a vision, that's who I try and go in as, someone with no ego and will say 'if my ego rises, please tell me.'

As reviewed in this section, we sometimes get stuck using buzzwords such as ally without really thinking of their meaning or purpose. Another Kitchen Table participant suggested that if a person presents themselves as an ally without the acknowledgement of their partners, it is merely a self-proclaimed title.

What is more important than the words we choose to describe what we are attempting to do is the action that we take to show support. I'm talking about rolling up your sleeves and standing by the sides of Indigenous partners, not just writing a cheque. As the popular saying goes, action speaks louder than words. When in doubt what to do, be present, participate, watch, listen, learn and ask how you can support in a valuable way without making it about you. This project has been a learning journey

not only for myself, but based on the gathered data, was also a learning opportunity for those who participated. The pre-existing relationships helped to create a sense of safety and comfort with and among each other that allowed for open, honest and at times uncomfortable discussions. With the advantage of Facebook, I am able to remain in contact with all the women who have graciously and courageously participated in the project building within it a sense of accountability on my part ensuring I am updating and sharing with everyone the progress and outcomes of the work.

This re-search project has challenged me to my core on multiple levels. Personally I have struggled with owning and naming my location within my own identity and connection to this land, the group, and rooting this work within an Indigenous approach as a settler within a Western-based academy focused on the outcome. As I had anticipated in the proposal defense, time has been my greatest challenge.

As described, relationships take time. Although technology was attempted to complete one of the Kitchen Table discussions, it was an utter failure and was put on hold until I was able to return to the city to meet face to face (which in the end was well worth the extended time as it was much more personable and engaging than our first attempt using Skype). I have found myself grappling with what relationship shall receive my greatest attention a) the relationship with the people participating with the project and the process of how the project has been committed to implementing as a learning opportunity within itself, or b) my relationship with completing the project within the time allowance provided in order to attain a degree. As it turns out, Graduate Studies has graciously provided multiple extensions to help accommodate the extended time I have needed to work on completing, however whether I am able to complete within the

extended time allowances I have been granted is still unknown. I may still run out of time within the requirements of the academy.

As much as I would be disappointed to not officially attain a degree, I would have to admit it has been one of the most important learning outcomes of my experience as it tapped into my ego, vulnerability, and sense of acceptance and approval. However, it has also taught me humility, the importance of trusting the relational process over the outcome, and self-discovery. I became aware of (a) a number of assumptions and biases with regards to my perception of western-based education and the academy, (b) the importance of evidence-based focus over broad generalizations, and (c) the surfacing of unresolved issues within myself. This reinforces the reality that learning and building relationships with knowledge, people or otherwise is an ongoing journey that never has a final destination, it is a life-long ongoing process. Regardless of these challenges, I still carry the privilege of having the option to do this work and the responsibility of not looking away just because it has been hard and at times very uncomfortable. The greatest learning has been in the process of the journey, from before it became a project through all the twists and turns to the completion of this written work (and what even may come to be from the ripples created), for this I will forever be changed and grateful.

If you recall, a very important factor for me with this project was to ensure that one of the outcomes resulted in the creation of something that could offer a practical tool for community beyond a narrative piece of writing rooted in theory and research based process. The next section is focused on highlighting how the learning and

process of this work informed the creation of a Guidebook for settlers interested and willing to learn and share space along the path.

Chapter Five: Walk With Me: Sharing Space on the Path

Introduction

As this search evolved, the title "Walk with Me: Sharing Space on the Path" became more than just the name of this paper. It became a metaphor for helping to explain a way of being and working. The task of this section was to pull together the learning of this journey and share with you, the reader, strategies that could support your journey of sharing space along the path of Indigenous and non-Indigenous collaborative alliances. To achieve this, a Guidebook was created, that will, with any luck, be a helpful tool for settlers (and Indigenous people working with settlers) wanting to build healthy relationships while working alongside each other in collaborative alliances.

The guidebook is entitled "*Walk with Me: Sharing Space along the Path: A Guidebook for non-Indigenous (settler) Peoples in supporting the development and maintenance of peaceful and active settler-ally relationships and the work of collaborative alliances*"[33]. The information within the guidebook is directly informed by this re-search project. The intention is to create a tool, beyond the theoretical narrative, that provides insight for non-Indigenous settlers who are searching for strategies to better understand how to walk ***with***, not in front of, or for, Indigenous Peoples as the path towards a new future unfolds.

[33] The Guidebook intentionally has not been included within this document to ensure it can remain independent and within the copyright ownership of the Community Advisory Group and participants.

Let's be really clear here however, learning to share space along the path is not something that can be learned within the pages of this thesis, the guidebook, or in a couple of conversations, but is a process that is forever ongoing. The thesis or the guidebook were not created to be a complete overview of Canadian history, detailed itemization of systemic challenges and barriers, or completed itemized checklist of how to's. It is merely one of many opportunities and tools for non-Indigenous settlers to support their journey of learning to share space along the path.

Walk with Me: Sharing Space along the Path Guidebook Overview

As mentioned, I tend to lean towards believing I am more of a learning practitioner before an academic. Developing the Guidebook offered the opportunity for me to not only accommodate the suggestions of the Kitchen Table participants, but to ensure a more user friendly and practically oriented guide created with less narrative and theory for those who may not be interested in reading through the 130 plus pages of this document. It is important to note at as of the writing of this thesis, the Guidebook had only been created in draft form. There will be continued work on this document upon the completion of the thesis that will include comprehensive feedback and input from the participants of this project. Once everyone is in agreement the Guidebook is complete, it will then be sent to a graphic designer prior to making it publically available for use.

The Guidebook is a much shorter version that is less than 100 pages. As within the pages of the thesis, it similarly speaks to the importance and power of language. As Kovach (2005) stresses, language really does shape the way we think and come to see and understand the world. Attention to language is a key element that has the potential

to impact and influence the work of collaborative alliances when people from different cultures and/or groups come together. When compiling documents or within group discussions, assumptions (either real or perceived) of how messages are worded have the power to either hurt or heal; divide or pull together members within the alliance.

Beyond the key element of language, the guidebook also outlines what has been called Guide Tips, or essentially key themes, that have been identified throughout this research project. There are seven (7) Guide Tips in total. Each Guide Tip shares insight and learning linked to that particular theme. They also include an exercise and actionable tools for the reader to work on their own development and learning. This commitment to an action-able practice of learning and critical reflection was another key element identified as vital in sharing space while working within collaborative alliances. The seven (7) Guide Tips are further highlighted below.

Guide Tip 1: Relationships Matter Above All

As demonstrated within this written work, one of the key factors within this Guide Tip is the importance of locating self to where you come from with regards to your ancestors roots. As settlers, we live on stolen land that was rightfully connected to the Indigenous people of this country prior to the arrival of the first explorers. Only through the enforcement of settler colonialism worldviews, practices and systems, were settlers able to become land owners. As such, this history has impacted the relational connections and experiences that need to be acknowledged. By locating self, this is one of the ways settlers can begin acknowledging relational connection to the land and with the Indigenous Peoples of their areas.

By first naming and claiming self-location, the next vital link to sharing space is learning and embracing the value of relationship. This can be a challenge for those who are rooted in a Western oriented capitalist-based value system driven by outcome and production over relationships. Within the guidebook, examples are used to help create further clarity and awareness of the importance of relationship and the role it plays within all things. The truth is, there are so many nuances related to building relationships and sharing space: it's ultimately all-encompassing and intertwined in everything. In reality, all the Guide Tips inform and impact relationship, but it was felt important to highlight it on its own to reinforce its importance. As many Indigenous scholars, such as Wilson (2008) and Absolon (2011), explain, within an Indigenous perspective relationship and relational accountability is a central and grounding core belief and value whereas within a mainstream perspective outcomes and achievements typically define value. When learning to share space, it is important for settlers to search for, and learn about the depth and contextual understanding around the value of relationships and how this may be different from your own.

Guide Tip 2: Perspective & Power

When sharing space along a path, it is critical to have an understanding of the worldviews, values and beliefs that inform your own and the different perspectives of those you may be walking with. The interesting thing about perspective and worldviews is that they aren't always the 'right' or 'only' way to see things. It just happens to be the angle that people are looking from. When considering Canada's past and present, the question must begin with 'from what perspective is the experience being considered?'

Within the history books typically taught in schools, the dominant narrative is presented from a non-Indigenous perspective that views the world from their own worldviews, values and experiences. Yet, there are so many experiences and perspectives silenced or rejected as not being legitimate requiring inclusion. It is the responsibility of all Canadians to begin their own search for ways to learn about concepts such as settler colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy because the dominant perspective holds power over decision making, policy and system development. To help further specify the impact of perspective and power, the discussion expends on the process of settler colonialism, patriarchy and capitalism while highlighting the importance of ensuring the inclusion of Indigenous women's perspective and voice understanding differences between traditional culture and mainstream/western culture.

Guide Tip 3: Words matter

As an extension of the earlier stated importance of language, this Guide Tip focuses attention on understanding what words are when communicating and creating messaging. Too often buzzwords or jargon are widely used yet rarely questioned or understood. As we communicate with each other there is often an assumption that everyone understands the words being used within the same meaning and context. This can be a dangerous assumption that either stalls progress or eventually fuels conflict. Spending time as a group to unpack the meanings of key terms used within messaging is a critical upfront investment that will have long-term benefits. It will not only ensure everyone is on the same page with understanding meaning within the same context, but fostering dialogue to support learning, growth and development as a collective.

Guide Tip 4: Get comfortable being uncomfortable

Getting comfortable being uncomfortable is something that may take practice and patience. As shared in the Kitchen Table discussions with some of the non-Indigenous participants, it's not easy being in situations where all that you have come to know is being unsettled and questioned. As non-Indigenous Peoples it is important to not be afraid to engage in uncomfortable and unsettling dialogue, discussions and decolonizing action. In fact, it is a response-ability that all Canadians have at every level of society, to unsettle the historical programming that informs how we see and behave within our world. Without this, there is risk of indifference and continued patterns of the past into the future. We are also in a time in history when Indigenous Peoples, especially women and youth, are reclaiming their power and voice refusing to be 'Idle No More'. Indigenous-led movements and projects are helping to create space and opportunity to not only identify injustices and response-ability to the land and water, but also to educate those who are ready to learn and come to understand different perspectives beyond what has become the dominant status quo. This undoubtedly means, non-Indigenous people will be required to work on becoming comfortable with being uncomfortable. Sharing space will prove to be challenging and rocky at times. Enduring the process will not always be comfortable, but will be necessary if success is to be achieved.

Guide Tip 5: Finding Common Ground

Within the Kitchen Table discussions, the participants referred to the importance of core values such as respect, honesty, humility and kindness/love as key elements needed to ensure healthy relationships. They also identified a number of barriers and gaps that

could negatively impact work within collaborative alliances. Within this Guide Tip it is suggested to implement a tool that outlines guiding principles that could act as a type of navigation system when working with a group and sharing space. A template example is shared that highlights factors such as creating safe, welcoming and ethical space, initiating discussions from a position of building and maintaining trust, celebration of diversity and inclusive engagement, and monitoring and evaluating the work of the collaboration. Within each of these factors there are a number of more actionable commitments and examples of how that factor can be achieved offering a tool that can help track and monitor progress of the group while providing suggestions if things become challenging.

Guide Tip 6: The Gifts of Conflict

All the Kitchen Table participants spoke to how conflict is an unavoidable reality, that it's not a matter of if conflict would occur, but a matter of when. Conflict is a normal and natural process of life and learning that will have its challenges and suffering. This is not to say that we should avoid the process, but be mindful enough to acknowledge that it will happen. There are many different tools and strategies that could be utilized to manage conflict but it will really depend on the group's preferences and experience. It's not conflict that breaks down relationships, it is how conflict is perceived, managed and processed that ultimately influences the impacts.

The guidebook offers a few examples of tools that could be used, but what is ultimately important is ensuring that the group works on identifying some mutually agreed upon trauma-informed tools and strategies for managing conflict before conflict

occurs. When working with people who may have experienced trauma in their past, conflict can be triggering. Canadian history has resulted in a lot of trauma for many people, whether in Residential Schools, dislocation from homelands, the sixties scoop[34] or the many other colonial strategies. Having a commitment to learn about, and practice trauma informed processes is also an important consideration for groups when preparing to deal with and manage conflict within relationships.

Guide Tip 7: Commitment to Reflection and Ongoing Development & Learning

The final Guide Tip speaks to the emphasis that learning to share space is more about the process than it is about outcome. Sharing space and building relationships requires lifelong commitment to critical reflection, learning, growth and development. Within the exercise for this Guide Tip, a number of different competencies are itemized for the reader to rate their level of experience or demonstrative behaviour. There is also the option for the reader to rate how their Indigenous colleagues may rate their experience or demonstrative behaviour to help expand the reader's perspective beyond what they may think their behaviour may be. This Guide Tip is rooted in the Kitchen Table discussions and the full acknowledgement of all the participants of the importance to ongoing reflection and learning. No one is ever perfect. No group is ever perfect. There is always opportunity to learn, grow and improve. It's important to remember that it has taken 7 generations to get to where we are now; it will also take time and committed action to create change and re/vision a future different than where we are now.

[34] The sixties scoop refers to the practice of taking children of Indigenous peoples in Canada from their families and placing in foster homes or adoption with mostly non-Indigenous families. This practice began in the 1960s and continued until the late 1980s.

The goal of the Guide Tips was to share the learning and knowledge gathered from this research project while offering different opportunities of awareness and/or tools to help those walking and sharing space along the path. One of the most important elements beyond learning, tools or strategies however, is a person's commitment to moving forward and not looking or walking away when something is hard or hurtful. Don't get me wrong. Sometimes the only thing that can be done when a situation is beyond repair or toxic is to walk away. However, we must remain committed to learning from the situation none-the-less and embracing the lessons that existed within the relationship while space was shared. This also calls for a commitment to allowing oneself to be vulnerable when times are difficult by asking for help, or pausing to rest and reflect on the different lessons that the journey has to offer. It is important for readers to remember they are not alone, have the courage to reach out to others who are also learning, growing and finding their way – there is strength in community.

Summary

In the end, there are three documents that complete this work. The writing within this document that you hold in your hands, the presentation guide created as part of the session facilitated at the Peace Leadership Conference in October of 2016 and the Guidebook. The thesis is my attempt to fulfill the requirements to attain a Masters degree. Regardless of how much I have tried to incorporate demonstrative practice within the style of writing, structure and formatting, it still remains very linear and limited in a practical way.

The presentation offered the opportunity to create a visual experience to share the learning and importance of why learning to share space and build relations with Indigenous Peoples is a responsibility of all Canadians. The presentation allows the opportunity to draw out, in a short amount of time, key elements that are vital in sharing space as well as model key learnings that were identified throughout this work. Some of which include the importance of valuing the experience, gifts and strengths that all people bring (i.e. when the audience members who hold the poles that were dis-membered, bring the pole back to the tipi to be re-membered). It also offers opportunity for participants to experience ceremony and how traditional culture is alive and strong despite the attempts of cultural genocide.

The Guidebook offers a more condensed and focused tool that attempts to encapsulate the learning of the thesis work into a more practical, hands on document that settlers can use as a guide on their own journey of learning to share space within collaborative alliances. Similar to the thesis work, the guidebook not only attempts to articulate information, but also demonstrate opportunities for learning. For example each Guide Tip has an exercise for reflection along with action tools that are meant to enforce the importance of ongoing critical self-reflection, growth and development. As mentioned, sharing space is not something that can be achieved but is an ongoing life-long commitment to face some difficult realities and not look away. It will get hard, uncomfortable and challenging. Conflict will happen. It’s normal and natural. The key is to remain committed to the path and staying grounded in understanding why it’s important for you to continue moving forward.

Although the presentation and Guidebook could remain independent documents on their own, the thesis could not be considered complete without their inclusion and reference. The presentation and Guidebook help to mobilize the learning of the thesis beyond what I could articulate within a theoretical list of findings. It is my hope that with the creation of the three pieces of work there is an intersection of learning, articulation and demonstration of the project outcomes and findings.

Chapter 6: Final Words: Closing in a Good Way

And so we have almost reached our shared path's end. Although this work was informed and guided by Indigenous women and leaders, it is important to re-acknowledge that I am a fragmented, privileged settler. Regardless how much effort and critical reflection I have attempted, it will still be riddled with colonial influences. Freeland Ballantyne (2014) declares "settlers do not have an alibi" (p. 69). The truth is, settler colonialism hurts many people I love and respect deeply and the critical focus must become how I, as part of settler colonialism, direct my privilege, energy and efforts to dismantling settler capitalism (Freeland Ballantyne, 2014).

My truth is I am a learning practitioner before an academic. My worldview and perspective are constantly informed by my 'real time' world around me. To look at partnerships and alliances from a purely Western academic place was not an option, nor would have been healthy for me as I am surrounded by partnerships and am completely embedded within them on personal, community and professional levels. If this search was to be meaningful and connected to my heart it needed to be conducted and presented in a way that modeled a practice I was searching and learning about. It is my hope that the work within this thesis, presentation outline, and guidebook, helps to capture the process that was followed and reflects the learning that was gained throughout the search. For example, at the front of the paper, the first front section focuses on acknowledging land, dedications and relations. The intention of this was to model an example of how words of relational accountability can be 'mobilized' within a piece of written work. Similarly, incorporating visual means of trying to capture and share information through the use of pictures, figures and tables was another

opportunity to model creative ways to help present information for people who learn and understand in other ways than narrative alone; this was my intention. I hope there was something that made sense to you along the way that you've been able to pick up and add to your journey of sharing space along the path, or paths, that you travel.

The Guidebook was created to help create a reflective lens combined with practical tools that could help mobilize your reflection with action making, not just an intellectual model but one that offers a way of being and doing. A real life challenge of the Guidebook is related to the fact that relationships do not happen in solitude nor are (or should be) one sided. Over the last few months in working on this writing I've been in situations where the intention was to build relationships, however, there has been a complete gap with regards to perspectives on just where the starting point for sharing space might be. The truth is, relationships are hard, yet unavoidable. If we try to avoid them, it will eventual create a-void, or an emptiness. The Guidebook is a tool that can help inform and provide people who are wanting to walk together and share space on the path with tools, insights and practical strategies for positive engagement and collaboration.

Although I have said this previously, I wish to reemphasize that I by no means own this work. This work is the result of a collaborative community effort of amazing, resilient, powerful women. However, as the writer of this work, I take full responsibility for any mistakes, misinterpretations or offenses throughout these pages. I can guarantee that it is not perfect and, when I come back to it in days or years to come, will be able to pick out gaps, misalignments, assumptions, mistakes. At some point however, analysis must come to an end and one must make the courageous choice to

put their work out in the world for all to see in its entirety (the good and the areas for further development and learning).

Although this writing has come to an end, the work is by no means over. I anticipate I will forever be connected to many of the women who contributed to this work in varying degrees (one of the advantages of Facebook). I also anticipate that the learning from this work is only yet another stepping stone along the way and other opportunities will bring us together again. As part of this journey, the Community Advisory Group will have opportunity to help decide and create plans on how the findings from this work can be shared with community. So, although the work of completing this academic piece becomes finalized, this information will not only be shared with community, but will continue to grow and develop as we continue to work and collaborate together.

It is my hope that you have found something within the pages of this work that will support you on whatever journey you may be traveling. It is my wish that as we are bombarded with the celebrations of Canada's 150 year celebration of Confederation that everyone commit to not forgetting that the last 150 years that has been destructive and hurtful as it has been successful in the experience of Indigenous Peoples across this land. It is the response-ability of all settlers to learn the true history of this country and commit to learning how to share space along the path as we look forward into the next 150 years and work on building a new future with Indigenous Peoples leading the way.

With this, I thank you for sharing space and walking with me. Before we go, it's important to close our circle in a good way. To do this I offer this prayer:

Grandmothers, Grandfathers, Spirit Helpers, Creator and great universe;

I pray to you with a good heart humbly thanking for your wisdom, direction and loving patience through this journey of learning.

I acknowledge and am grateful for the openness and courage of all Community Contributors, Community Advisory and the readers of this work.

I pray that this work will create a ripple effect and be useful in whatever way it is meant to.

To All My Relations, this I pray.

Picture 7: The End of Our Path. Until our paths cross again, I wish you well and hope you were able to gather some new awareness that may be helpful on your path ahead.

Thank you for walking with me.

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