

Food as helper, food as healer: How Cree Elders incorporate food into helping and healing practices and the implications for Indigenous food sovereignty

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Abstract

Historically and contemporarily, colonial policies and prejudices have deeply affected Indigenous food systems and thus Indigenous bodies. For Cree peoples in Manitoba, these policies include the criminalization of practicing traditional medicines, residential schools and land dispossession in the name of development. However, despite the challenges and interruptions to food and cultural systems, Cree Elders understand food to be sacred, and moreover, a healer. This qualitative study, grounded in Indigenous research methodologies, sought to investigate the role of food in Cree culture, through understanding how Elders incorporate food into their helping and healing practices. Using metaphor to make meaning of the Elder stories, this research articulates the role of food in Cree culture: through feeding oneself, one's ancestors, and one's community. The Elders revealed the rich depth of Cree food knowledges that underlie Cree culture, from star stories, language, and grieving ceremonies to knowledge of plant and food medicines. This dissertation is an exploration of Cree guidance for revitalizing and rebuilding Cree food systems as part of a larger Indigenous food sovereignty framework.

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I am a huge supporter of what Aminatou Sow and Ann Friedman (2020) describe as shine theory, which theorizes one's success as being intertwined to the success of those around you. The idea is when we give of ourselves to each other, we shine together. In this spirit, there is a particular kinship that has been extended to me that I would like to acknowledge. Thank you to Jaime Cidro, Dawn Morrison, Nathalie Bays, Dené Sinclair, Mary Kate Dennis, Gladys Rowe, Annette Desmarais, Barb Parker, Dale Galbraith, Jessica McLaughlin, Martha Barwinsky, Hannah Wittman, Sherry Pictou, Kristin Burnett, Ingrid Aubrey, Kelly Skinner, Leona Star, Kathy Kinew, Wendy McNab, Nicole Davies, Ashley Hayward, Monica Cyr, Alice Rigney, Deborah Froese, Jennifer Hedges, Patricia Garrod, and Elisa Levi. Your kindness, gentleness, toughness, humour and encouragement has been instrumental in my life. You are my sisters, aunts, teachers, mentors, and allies. You have invested in me, and I am better because you have pushed me.

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Dedication

For my parents, who have worked so hard to keep me fed. Thank you times a million.

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Chapter 1: Introductions

Prior to colonization, Indigenous peoples lived in harmony with land, were able to feed their communities, and trade with others (Atleo Jr. [Nuu-chah-nulth/Tsimshian], 2012; Morrison [Secwepemc], 2011). While seasonal fluctuations occurred, hunger was not an enduring challenge for Indigenous peoples (Council of Canadian Academies, 2014). Land provided the means for survival: clothing, shelter, tools, food, and transportation. Land was (and is) home, identity, and belonging (Anderson, 2011 [Cree/Métis]; Coulthard [Yellowknives Dene], 2014); language, ceremony, and song (Basso, 1996; King [Cherokee], 2012); well-being and spirit (Morrison, 2011); pedagogy (Simpson [Anishinaabe], 2014); teacher and healer (Coulthard, 2014; Kimmerer [Potawatomi], 2003), and more.

To say that Indigenous peoples had and have a close relationship with the land is too simplistic. Rather, as Simpson [Anishinaabe] (2017) explains, “we relate to land through connection – generative, affirmative, complex, overlapping, and nonlinear *relationship*” (p. 43). This is present tense, of course, because Indigenous peoples are still here. Indigenous peoples do not only have a relationship with the land, but are actively in relation to the land. Relation to the land as a generative and complex process reveals the depth of knowledge contained within the land, and the depth of Indigenous knowledges contained within Indigenous bodies. These understandings, practices, and processes, and the health of the land were dramatically altered, beyond recognition, in many instances, through colonialism. The result was and has continued to be loss, trauma, and grief (Brave Heart, 1998).

According to Morrison (2020), “Since the rise of agriculture, the health of humans and ecosystems has drastically declined” (p. 19). In Manitoba, and throughout the prairie provinces, treaty negotiations were set against the backdrop of rampant starvation in First Nations

communities, deliberately inflicted through overhunting of species such as bison and beaver, and through the drainage of wetlands to support settler agriculture. Wolves were also hunted for their fur, or rather poisoned using strychnine. The wolves would go into “convulsions, drooling and vomiting in the grass, inadvertently killing more buffalo” and birds and horses (Monchalin [Algonquin/Métis/Huron], 2016, p. 96). The prairies were killing grounds. Treaties were presented as a means to alleviate starvation that resulted from the loss of animals; hunger was weaponized to coerce Indigenous communities into negotiations and onto reserves. Many Chiefs understood the loss of these species meant starvation; this was a new reality and they were concerned about the negotiations:

[T]he buffalo will be gone before many snows. What then will be left with us with which to bargain? With the buffalo gone we will have only the vacant prairie which none of us have learned to use. Can we stop the power of the white man from spreading over the land like the grasshoppers that cloud the sky and then fall to consume every blade of grass and every leaf on the trees in their path? I think not. Before this happens, let us ponder carefully our choice of roads. (Chief Ahtahkakoop, cited in Daschuk, 2013, p. 97)¹

Chief Ahtahkakoop’s statement demonstrates the knowledge and fear of what was still to come. The loss of these animals eliminated the economic base for Indigenous peoples resulting in a state of dependency (Lux, 2001). Sadly, there were no alternate paths for the starvation that was wrought onto the peoples. Despite the promise of rations through the treaties, food rations were foreign and diminished from the fur trade. Government officials continued to use hunger as a

¹ At times throughout this dissertation, I also use we to describe the nation, community and ancestry that I am connected to through blood, sweat, and tears. Carrying on the tradition of Indigenous authors writing themselves in their work, I will continue to use “we”.

weapon for dealing with First Nations: punishment for being malnourished, under-clothed, and sick, government withheld rations (Daschuk, 2013). In other instances, the rations were rancid, yet still fed to First Nations. In response to complaints of the conditions of the rations, Indian Commissioner Edgar Dewdney replied, “the Indians should eat the bacon or die...” (cited in Daschuk, 2013, p. 143). Many Indians did, in fact, die, a critical element of the story of the creation of Canada. In order for colonization to proceed, Indigenous peoples had to be eliminated (Monchalin, 2016). When they survived, efforts turned towards assimilation, particularly through agriculture.

As agriculture was presented as a means to alleviate the loss of hunting, “the government pressed its advantage to enforce its vision of the prairies as a frontier for investment and settlement” (Lux, 2001, p. 20). Challenges surrounding the use of agriculture in Indigenous communities were plentiful. For example, lack of knowledge around how to plant new crops such as oats and barley meant instruction was necessary for communities. Similarly, the government’s slow response to providing the implements promised within the negotiations meant that communities had to eat their livestock because there was no food or supports for the care of the livestock (Lux, 2001). Indigenous farmers were also “subject to regulations that denied them the technological and financial opportunities to form a strong agriculture base” (Carter, 1990, p. 12). Agriculture was not the savior it was promised to be, and hunger continued. Further efforts towards colonizing Indigenous food systems include nutrition experiments conducted through 1940s and 1950s in northern Indigenous communities, including Cross Lake and Norway House First Nations (Mosby, 2013). Upon visiting these communities and witnessing the malnutrition and hunger, the government and its allies were quick to chastise Indigenous peoples: “shiftlessness, indolence, improvidence and inertia, so long regarded as

inherent or hereditary traits in the Indian race may, at the root, be really the manifestations of malnutrition” (cited in Mosby, 2013, p. 147). Despite documented malnutrition, the “test subjects” received nutritional supplements rather than food, the opportunity for research more important than the subjects themselves (Mosby, 2013). Experiments were also conducted on children in residential schools, where attempts to “kill the Indian” by removing children from the land, their families, and cultures through forcible placement in church-run boarding schools continued as part of Canada’s assimilation project (Shewell, 2004). According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (2015), children in residential schools were given inadequate food, in quality, quantity and nutrition. Children also experienced bullying, physical and sexual abuse; the list of traumas is long. Moreover, Indigenous children’s relationship to their food and cultural systems was severed. While these are stories of the past, they are also connected to much of the trauma experienced by Indigenous peoples today: “Children who were abused in schools sometimes went on to abuse others. Some students developed addictions as a means of coping. Students who were treated and punished as prisoners in the schools sometimes graduated to real prisons” (TRC, 2015, p. 3). Starvation is trauma and trauma is intergenerational. Examining the past provides an important backdrop for understanding the present, and can help us navigate our future.

Hunger, starvation, disease, experimentation, assimilation, oppression: these are the words that describe the colonized food system that was forced onto Indigenous communities (McCallum, 2017). These traumas have affected Indigenous food systems, and thus, a way of life, where people of the land cannot access food from the land (LaDuke [Anishinaabe], 2005). Today, experiences of hunger for Indigenous peoples are still significantly greater than the rest of Canadians (Community Food Centres Canada, 2020), and the hunger story continues. Yet,

despite the hunger, challenges, injustices, and inequities that Indigenous peoples experience in Canada, there also has been a more recent movement to re-connect land-based food and cultural traditions through a practice known as Indigenous food sovereignty (IFS). Indigenous food sovereignty represents a catalyzing moment and movement of activity that supports Indigenous peoples' well-being, rights, responsibilities, and cultures. With myriad expressions of Indigenous food sovereignty across the country, IFS is happening on the land, in classrooms, and even courtrooms as defenders stand up to protect our lands (Manuel [Secwepemc] & Derrickson [Syilx (Okanagan)], 2015). Stories of food systems renewal and reclamation are optimistic, and powerful. They provide a pathway into what Indigenous futures can look like by stepping outside of the colonial food system. Bringing together a colonial past and a resurgent present requires a more complex understanding of the role of food in Indigenous cultures. Starvation was used as a weapon to control and kill Indigenous peoples. Before it was weaponized, food was healer. This dissertation takes us through the trauma of starvation and back to food as healer. As a Cree woman, my specific interest lies in the exploration of the role of food in Cree culture. My guiding question was as follows: How do Cree Elders understand the role of food in their helping and healing practices?

Who are the Cree?

Cree people are largely found in northern parts of so-called Canada. The origins of the term Cree are derived from a French term *Kristinon* (Hart, 2007). Hart (2007) explains: "In turn, *Kristinon* is said to be a derivative of the Anishinaabe term *kiristinō* that referred to a division of Cree speaking people living south of James Bay in the mid-seventeenth century (Brightman, 2002)" (p. 10). He adds that Cree is not the name Cree people use in speaking their own language. Weber- Pillwax (2001) writes of the Cree movement westward as occurring over hundreds of years, and how "their ways of life were influenced by, and in turn influenced the

ways of the tribal groups they met. The merging of social groups and economic structures through intermarriage and trade was a logical outcome of the interface between an existing society and a peacefully encroaching one” (p. 150). The *Muskéko Ininiwak*; *Néhithawak* or what some call *Asiníkáwithiniwak*; and *Néhiyawak* all reside in parts of what is now known as Manitoba: “These references respectively reflect the “n”, “th,” and “y” dialects of the Cree language” (Hart, 2007, p. 10). Cree is also one of five linguistic groups in so-called Manitoba; the area of focus for this research.

Cree peoples’ experiences with the colonial food system as described earlier and throughout varies from nation to nation. The Elders spoke to experiences of moving, re-locating, and forced movement/re-location as part of their own journeys, thus it is important to consider the ways this movement altered relationships with food and culture. Daschuk’s (2013) *Clearing the Plains*, Mosby’s (2013) writing on nutritional experiments in northern Cree communities and the Truth and Reconciliation (2015) all speak to the ways Cree peoples have been affected by the colonial food system. Other research in Cree territories talks about the damages of resource extraction and hydro-development dams (Hoffman, 2008). Given Weber-Pillwax’s (2001) insight into the movement and interaction of Cree peoples, it is safe to say that no one Cree experience with the colonized food system looks the same. Rather, with trade networks and movement of nations, there are many varied Cree experiences around food.

Importance of this Study

The potential for Indigenous peoples’ relationships to food and land has yet to be adequately covered in the literature. Currently, these relationships are considered part of Indigenous helping practices presented largely through ceremony (Johnston [Chippewas of Nawash], 1990; Nabigon, [Ojibway] 2006). While undoubtedly important, there is also a need and desire to understand the potential of food in other Indigenous helping capacities. Notably, participation in land and food-

based programs and systems (Bang [Ojibwe] et al., 2014; Simpson [Anishinaabe], 2014) has revealed stronger senses of belonging, connection to the land, and self-esteem (Robin [Cree] & Cidro [Anishinaabe], 2020; Gaudet [Métis], 2021). These experiences are not being captured in the social work literature, and these opportunities are not often utilized in conventional social work practices. Moreover, food is deeply siloed and often viewed merely as sustenance. To date, government has yet to bring stakeholders to the same table to talk about the ways that food, health, education, social and environmental justice, and Indigenous self-determination can and do work together. This is a glaring gap within the discourse and movement surrounding Indigenous food sovereignty and food systems revitalization. My goal is to understand and thus advocate the use of food and land in helping and healing practices through both an Indigenous food sovereignty and Indigenous helping and healing lens. If the intent of IFS is to acknowledge that food and life are sacred (Morrison, 2011), there is a need to explore the connections between IFS and healing for Indigenous peoples and their food systems. This study contributes to various literatures: food sovereignty and Indigenous food sovereignty, Indigenous healing and well-being, critical dietetics, social work and native studies. It also contributes to the growing literature on Indigenous resurgence, reclamation, resistance, and revitalization. While the context of this research is on Cree peoples, lands, and communities in Manitoba, it can be considered by other Indigenous communities across Turtle Island who face similar realities. The values and perspectives of Cree food systems described in this research can and does extend across nations (see for example, Coté [Nuu chah nulth], 2016; Delormier [Mohawk] et al., 2017; Johnston, 1990; Morrisseau [Anishinaabe], 1998). Similarities are important in connecting with one another. At the same time, differences speak to the diversity of nations worldviews, values, and perspectives. Moreover, the diversity of experiences of colonialism and a colonized food system

are felt differently across the country. This reflects diverse geographies and colonial agendas based on the demand for resource extraction. While this writing offers some Cree perspectives, some of that information can be extrapolated, but other information cannot. Thus, attention to specific locations and histories in understanding Indigenous food systems is critical.

Indigenous healing is a necessity for recovering from colonization and assimilation (Simpson [Anishinaabe], 2017). Healing is also “the pursuit of wholistic health and wellness through the prevention and treatment of illness” (Hill [Anishinaabe], 2021, p. 6). Importantly healing practices have been used prior to colonization (Linklater [Anishinaabe], 2014). Jean Stevenson [Cree] (1999) explains Indigenous healing through metaphor; the torn cloth, an apt picture of the effects of colonization:

Taking a healing journey can be understood as reweaving a cloth. Abuse and neglect tear and shred the inner life of a person, leaving holes and ragged edges hindering the ability to trust, eroding the sense of identity and decreasing confidence and the ability to relate to others. The healing journey is the act of mending this fabric. (p. 10)

Through healing journeys and pathways, there is an opportunity to experience a stronger sense of well-being, one that connects the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual elements of being. This dissertation is my attempt at beginning to mend the fabric.

Introducing Myself

Indigenous scholarship demands accountability, honesty and self-location. We are not separate from the work we undertake. Offering who I am and how I came to be is an integral process in Indigenous research. As Absolon [Anishinaabe] and Willett [Cree] (2005) describe, this is what you know first. Perhaps it is also what you should know best, though I am not sure

that I do. In any case, I can locate myself and explain how I came here in order to be accountable to those involved in my research journey.

Tansi, Sîpîhkopinesîs, nitisiyihkason. My name is Tabitha. I am a mixed ancestry Swampy Cree, Métis and European woman². I come from a long line of fishermen. My European and Indigenous family met fishing the waters of Lake Winnipeg and intermarried. I did not grow up knowing I was Indigenous, though on reflection I can see that my culture and my family's colonial history was all around me. My grandmother's experiences in what my family refers to as "Catholic boarding school" left her with a drug addiction. My grandmother later released her responsibility to my father when he was a pre-teen. A ward of the state, he became a street kid, a hustler trying to find food and shelter. Not surprisingly, dysfunction carried on throughout my childhood. Fortunately, I learned at a young age that the outdoors was a refuge. As a child, I was fascinated by nature and would collect buckets of boreal chorus frogs, forage for wild strawberries, and pick bouquets of bluebells. I have always felt an affinity towards the land. Even as child, I was concerned about the environment, playing the rain forest in a school play and joining a long-forgotten initiative called the Kids for Saving Earth Club at my local grocery store.

As an adult, I developed a blood disease, heart condition, and seizure disorder that western medicine has been able to manage, but only through a treatment regime that leaves me bed-ridden for months. I have been told I will likely face these challenges for the rest of my life and the implications of these conditions and my associated treatment regime continue to result in further deteriorations of my health. Through years of counselling, ceremony, prayer, meditation,

² I would be remiss to mention that with recent attention on Indigenous scholars' claims to Indigenous identity, I have gone back to my family's genealogy. I have realized that it is not enough to make statements based on family stories, and so I offer here my Métis heritage. I am in the process of applying for citizenship through the Manitoba Métis Federation.

and land-based activities, I have come to understand that my dis-ease is a manifestation of the trauma I endured throughout my childhood and into my 20s. While I experience fear and frustration around my health, I have found some level of peace with where I am, in part, because of traditional medicine and ceremony.

Robbins [Mi'kmaq] and Dewar [Huron-Wendat] (2011) state that the process of learning about and participating in healing is very individual and “depends upon the personal experience of the individual author(s)/researcher(s)” (p. 2). Indeed, as an Indigenous woman and student (both in my culture and doctoral program) who accesses both western medicine and traditional Indigenous medicine and healing practices, the ways I interpret and express healing is as someone who holds a deep belief in the processes of Indigenous healing. At some point in my health journey, I re-discovered the power of food and land. I found that I could re-assert some semblance of sovereignty over my health largely by choosing a land-based diet focused on Indigenous foods and medicines. My ability to complete a doctoral program amidst chronic and consistent health challenges is a testament to the cultural supports I have around me and my dogged and imperfect commitment to undertake the work of healing.

I am an active harvester, and love to spend time on the land, gardening, foraging, fishing and working with plants and seeds. I am also deeply involved in the Indigenous food sovereignty movement in Manitoba and Canada. I feel blessed to have the opportunity to study Indigenous food sovereignty, for it takes me on the land, and back to my roots, presenting me with the opportunity to heal in new, but old ways: through the traditions of my ancestors.

My positionality also informs the research questions I have and how I interpret the findings. Had I not been actively working on my own healing, I may not have seen or been exposed to ways that food is used in ceremony and other cultural practices. It is also important to

locate myself in place and time: we are in the midst of a global pandemic and a racial reckoning. This is a critical juncture where we are beginning to see the intersections of racism and a food system ill-equipped for a global pandemic; though admittedly, I have seen the desire to work towards being anti-racist wax and wane. In terms of place, I am at home, and have been far removed from the cultural supports that are necessary to my well-being. For 2020-2021, this has meant no ceremonies, and a loss of access to my on-reserve family and lands. I state this here to describe the nature of undertaking research on healing and being well while much of the world is not.

How to Read This Dissertation

Before beginning, I offer here suggestions and a backdrop for how to read my work. I present a series of stories: mine, those of the Elders interviewed for this research, and one of a larger colonial experience that is woven throughout. Stories are important in Indigenous cultures. They are a form of learning, sharing, growing, and understanding our past, present, and future (Archibald [Sto:lo], 2008). Stories provide guidance, but they are not prescriptive. From an Indigenous worldview, stories are understood as context-specific, person-specific, and timing-specific. Thus, what you read here is *my* interpretation of stories with the blessing of the Elders who agreed to share their stories with me. You are reading how I interpret the literature and how I made meaning and connections within the stories offered to me. Importantly, I do not offer the stories here as a source of voyeurism, nor romanticism. To read as such perpetuates the harms of the past, harms Indigenous peoples have experienced and continue to experience through research.

Ethnographers, photographers, researchers, and explorers have told our stories in damaging ways (Gilchrist [Cree], 1997). Linda Tuhiwai Smith [Maori] (2012) describes how little is actually known about Indigenous cultures, “It galls us that Western researchers and

intellectuals can assume to know all that is possible to know of us, on the basis of their brief encounters with some of us” (p. 1). Indigenous peoples have been presented as the other, as savage, exotic, broken, and strangely, despite our so-called hedonistic tendencies, as romantic relics of a previous era. Take Edward Sheriff Curtis, for example, the photographer famous for his images of “Photographed Indians”, as King (2003) explains:

Curtis was looking for the literary Indian, the dying Indian, the imaginative construct. And to make sure that he would find what he wanted to find, he took along boxes of “Indian” paraphernalia – wigs, blankets, painted backdrops, clothing – in case he ran into Indians who did not look as the Indian was supposed to look. (p. 34)

I wish I could say that we are no longer presented as the “Photographed Indians”. I have been told my work around the revitalization of Indigenous food systems is rooted in a past that no longer exists, that modernization is the way forward, a salvation, I suppose, for colonialism. Yet, the growing movement and mobilization of land-based food systems in Indigenous communities suggests otherwise.

To present all of the ways Indigenous peoples have been interpreted is frankly exhausting. Our pasts have been described, analyzed, and judged without our consent or input by those who could not see us. The Elders who participated in this research reminded me that what was shared was not owned by them or anyone else. They exhibited considerable humility in sharing their stories and knowledges, often telling me when they were not sure, or could not speak to this or that. In academia, we must always cite our work, the citations implying a kind of ownership of ideas. But in an Indigenous context, teachings and ideas, belong with the people. Knowledge is transferred deliberately in our communities; it belongs to Creation.

This dissertation belongs with the people. I am merely a conduit of these knowledge processes. I write with the hope that we can continue with the important truthing required in the truth and reconciliation process, and that we can also learn from the truth in ways that operationalize the vast and robust Indigenous knowledges that can and do work to keep people well. This should be read with the understanding that all ideas, elements, and stories are relational, interconnected, and contextual.

Language is a powerful tool. Outside of a few key concepts, what is presented through this paper is in the English language. I continue to acknowledge that these subjects, particularly well-being and healing, may be best presented through Indigenous languages, but I do not speak the Cree language. Throughout this writing, I use a few terms to describe Indigenous peoples. Indigenous is a favoured term for it describes peoples whose ancestry comes from the original inhabitants of Canada. Moreover, it is political and “inclusive of all first peoples – unique in our own cultures – but common in our experiences of colonialism and our understanding of the world” (Wilson [Cree], 2008, p. 16). I use the terms First Nations and Cree, to describe specific nations of people.

Within discussions around Indigenous food sovereignty and the role of food in Cree culture, the term “traditional foods” will primarily be used. Various terms are used to describe land-based, historical foods: gathered foods, country foods, and traditional foods are all employed in the literature. It is worth noting that traditional comes with its own criticisms. The term “traditional foods” has been argued as too rigid to describe store-bought foods that were used historically. Foods such as salmon and berries are often purchased at stores, having been grown, harvested, and processed in a modern-day context (Luppens, 2009). However, according to Hanemaayer et al. (2020), traditional

foods are place-based: “most commonly traditional foods are defined as those that are available to a particular Indigenous culture from the local natural environment, including both plant and animal species” (p.1). For the purposes of this paper, traditional foods will be used in accordance with the above definition. Cree foods are inherently place-based and the Elders that participated in this project have spoken to this. Throughout this paper, I have also attempted to locate Indigenous scholarship. Indigenous healing, helping, and well-being are subjective, and intimate, and for many Indigenous scholars, providing insight into this topic comes from personal experience. Thus, to the best of my ability Indigenous authors are indicated throughout.

Chapter Outlines

This dissertation is a story about the stories of the healing power of food and the powerful forces behind how and why Indigenous peoples eat what they do. Following introductions, I provide an overview of the literature about Indigenous peoples and their food and cultural systems in Canada. In chapter 2, I begin with a discussion on colonization and the ways that colonization has interfered with Indigenous lands and bodies, the central components of an Indigenous food system. I pay specific attention to Cree examples and authors and offer a discussion on the elements of Indigenous healing, and conclude with an overview of Indigenous food sovereignty, as process and in practice on Turtle Island. Chapter three is an examination of the worldviews, methodologies, and metaphors that guide this research process. I describe elements of an Indigenous research methodology in action, with some attention to conducting this research during a global pandemic. Chapter four highlights the conversations with the Elders that joined me by participating in this research journey. Their words are critical to the layout of the chapter, as I attempted to keep story together in larger pieces. I use and explain the metaphor

that supported a closer look at the relationships, connections, and outliers from the Elder's stories to understand what it means to be fed. In chapter five, I offer insight based the literature, stories, and my own experiences. I use an interdisciplinary approach to discuss topics ranging from food literacy and Indigenism to the effects of hydro development on Cree culture. Woven throughout is my own story of being mixed blood Cree with mixed-up blood: I have lived in intergenerational trauma and describe my own blood condition. Despite this, I end with a note of optimism. In the conclusion, I talk about steps for moving forward and describe my unshakeable belief in Indigenous food sovereignty. Thank you for joining me.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review will focus on five main areas: first, a brief description of the theoretical underpinnings of the proposed research; second, understanding the processes of colonization as they impact well-being; third, foundational concepts for Indigenous helping and healing; fourth, understanding Indigenous trauma and healing; and finally, how Indigenous well-being and healing fit within the context of Indigenous food sovereignty.

The emphasis of this discussion will be on Cree peoples, worldviews, values, principles, and ways of knowing, being, seeing, and doing. In some cases, the words *Muskego*, *Inninemew*, and *Muskego Inninemew* will be used to reflect the languages of Cree cultures in Manitoba. In some instances, First Nations will be used when reflected in the literature; Cree nations are considered to be First Nations by the federal and provincial governments.

Theoretical Framework

Indigenous holistic theory is “derived from the teachings of the land, sun, water, sky and all of Creation. It’s methodologies of practice integrate the natural teachers and elements of the earth” (Absolon [Anishinaabe], 2010, p. 23). Simpson [Anishinaabe] (2017) shares how her journey in learning to see Indigenous theory came only after decades of engaging in Nishnaabeg practice, particularly on the land. According to Simpson (2011), Indigenous thought “not only maps a way out of colonial thinking by confirming Indigenous lifeways or alternative ways of being in the world” but also works to dismantle colonialism while focusing on *mino bimaadiziwin* (p. 31). She states that for too long, Indigenous peoples have been presented as non-thinking peoples despite having our own ways of thinking, knowing, seeing, and doing. Of particular interest for my own research project is the idea Simpson (2011) posits in asking that we no longer focus on how to dismantle Audre Lorde’s master’s house, but rather, “we re-build

our own house, or our own houses” (p. 32). Indeed, the proposed research is based on Indigenous knowledges and practices that exist to help re-build our houses, or as Stevenson (1999) stated, mend the tattered fabric through a healing process. Indigenous healing and Indigenous food sovereignty are both means in which to resist, recover, reclaim and resurge Indigenous ways of knowing, being, seeing, and doing.

Importantly, Indigenous ways of knowing need not be compared with Western thought or considered as an antidote to Western thought (Kovach [Cree/Saulteaux], 2009). These practices, both historical and contemporary, have evolved over time and are enough on their own. According to Kovach (2009) this means upholding “Indigenous thought through a personal interpreted tribal lens” (p. 174). Million [Athabaskan] (2013) argues for felt theory: “we seek to present our histories as affective, *felt*, intuited as well as thought” (p. 57). This theoretical positioning aligns with Indigenous epistemologies of centering lived and personal experience as knowledge (Ermine [Cree], 1995). Feelings, intuition, and thought are all important ways of knowing and learning about healing. In many ways, this is a response to the ways that colonization has been a *felt* experience.

Based on the work of Rowe [Swampy Cree] (2013), a *Muskego Inninuwak*³ theoretical framework will guide this research project. This is apt given my own Swampy Cree background and the location of my proposed research in Manitoba. According to Rowe (2013) use of a *Muskego Inninuwak* methodology includes concepts of relationality, relational accountability, and *mino-pimatisiwin*⁴. A conceptual framework provides a way for researchers to demonstrate the “theoretical and practical underpinnings of their research” (Kovach, 2009, p. 39). The theoretical framework for this research encompasses an Indigenous research paradigm that

³ Swampy Cree

⁴ The good life. This concept is explained more fully on pg. 28.

privileges relationships, accountability, and interconnectedness. Importantly, it positions land, food and Elders as teachers.

Colonization

Through the processes and projects of colonialism, loss has become a dominating feature of Indigenous peoples' lives (Gray, Yellow Bird [Three Affiliated Tribes] & Coates, 2008). Loss, grief, trauma, dispossession, subjugation, objectification, marginalization, and oppression are all (and only some of the) experiences incurred as a result of colonization (Coulthard, 2014; LaRocque [Cree Métis], 2010; McCallum [Lunaape], 2017). For the purposes of this literature review, I will focus on colonization as it pertains to my overall research question that examines food and land-based healing and helping systems. That is to say, much may be missed, but I present colonization through the myriad ways it affects the well-being of both people and the land that support Indigenous peoples. Importantly, while scholars have addressed colonialism, and impacts on Indigenous peoples (see, Smith [Maori], 2012 for example), the multitudes of realities that colonialism has constructed are complex and are neither homogenous or unitary (Hart [Cree], 2007). Hart and Rowe [Cree] (2014) have pointed to the lack of Indigenous voices in colonialism definitions. Thus, this section of the dissertation will largely feature the voices of Indigenous scholars, Elders, and writers.

The concepts of power, control, and freedom are central to colonialism. According to Alfred [Mohawk] and Corntassel [Cherokee] (2005), the language of colonialism is fraught with problems: "It must be recognized that colonialism is a narrative in which the Settler's power is the fundamental reference and assumption, inherently limiting Indigenous freedom and imposing a view of the world that is but an outcome or perspective on that power" (p. 601). Michael Yellow Bird (2008) has referred to the process of colonization through the relationships that exist between peoples. In an Indigenous context, Yellow Bird has adopted Hegel's Lordship and

Bondage (or Master-Slave) as the Colonizer and the Colonized. If through the interaction of the Colonizer and Colonized, Indigenous peoples, fearful for their lives, “acknowledge and accept the power and presence of the master, which includes his or her words, ideas, beliefs, and values” the cycle of colonization will continue (Yellow Bird, 2008, p. 276). Hegel⁵ (1977) argued that the presence of the Master (Colonizer) was weakened by its dependency on the Slave (Colonized). According to Hegel, without Indigenous peoples, the Colonizer and indeed, the country of the Colonizer, is without meaning. Albert Memmi’s (1965) seminal work, *The Colonizer and The Colonized*, provides further insight into this fraught relationship. Writing of the portrait of the Colonizer, Memmi shares: “with all of his power he must disown the colonized while their existence is indispensable to his own” (p. 54). The rationale for colonialism and its ideas are insidious and dangerous. Frantz Fanon’s (1952) *Black Skin, White Masks* examines the ways in which Black colonized races internalized the ideas of their white colonizers. This is a common experience; at some point the colonizer’s voice begins to become part of the internal dialogue of the colonized. Métis scholar Howard Adams (1975) argues that the processes of internalizing the colonizer’s culture results in Indigenous peoples pursuing the colonizer’s vision of life and success. Fanon (1952, 1961) writes of these dangers and later of the need for violence in order to overthrow colonialism.

Colonialism presents a deeply troubling situation in which a pathological dependence exists between the colonizer and the colonized. However, it is important to note that it is not only Indigenous peoples trapped in a cycle of dependency based on the systems developed and controlled by the colonizer, but rather that the colonizer requires the survival of Indigenous peoples to continue their own sense of identity. In the context of healing from colonization, I

⁵ While Hegel is not Indigenous, he is the outlier in this section of Indigenous voices. The framework of Master-Slave has been so foundational to my own learning that I would be remiss not to mention it here.

present two major themes that directly impact Indigenous well-being: loss of control and loss of land.

Loss of Control

Colonialism has been defined as encompassing invasion, theft, and starvation (LaRocque, 2010); loss of land control (Manuel & Derrickson, 2015); dependency and dehumanization (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005); and hyper-exploitation (Simpson, 2017) of Indigenous peoples and their lands. Colonization has used force, terror, and policies, leaving behind “jagged worldviews” whereby, in the words of Leroy Little Bear [Blood First Nation] (2000), “many collective views of the world competed for control of their behaviour, and since none was dominant modern Aboriginal people had to make guesses or choices about everything. Aboriginal consciousness became a site of overlapping, contentious, fragmented, competing desires and values” (p. 85).

Canada’s history of colonialism is long and complex, but deeply rooted in the worldviews of Europeans who considered Indigenous peoples to be inferior (Monchalin [Algonquin/Huron/Métis], 2016). Early examples can be seen in the Royal Proclamation of 1763, which outlined the power structure between Indigenous and European peoples over land. The Proclamation recognizes Indigenous rights to land; however, both Indigenous peoples and lands were placed under the dominion and protection of the Crown (Hart & Bracken, 2016). Later examples include the European direction of the fur trade which left Indigenous peoples entrenched in a cycle of dependency (Daschuk, 2013).

Concepts of inferiority are mirrored in the forced assimilation that has plagued Indigenous peoples for hundreds of years. The introduction and enforcement of the Indian Act served to reduce and eliminate Indigenous agency over their lives. The Indian Act was based upon two earlier pieces of legislation designed to assimilate Indigenous peoples: The Gradual Civilization Act and the Gradual Enfranchisement Act (Monchalin, 2016; Sinclair

[Cree/Assiniboine/Saulteaux], 2004). Monchalin (2016) explains some of the ways these acts took shape:

Enfranchisement was to be completely voluntary. At the same time, however, the wife and children of any enfranchised “Indian” man would lose their status and become colonial citizens whether they wanted to or not. Many First Nations peoples strongly opposed this legislation, which they saw as a threat to the integrity of their lands. (p. 108)

Through the Indian Act, major cultural changes were legislated: ceremonial and thus, land-based activities were made illegal; women and their families lost their status as Indians (instead gaining the full benefits of Canadian citizenship) (Coulthard, 2014), and traditional Indigenous governance systems were eliminated (Alfred, 1999). Coulthard (2014) argues for the need to understand and acknowledge how the Indian Act has “come to discursively shape, regulate, and govern how many of us have come to think about Indigenous identity and community belonging” (p. 103) so that we no longer contribute to its racist and sexist structures. The loss of control, agency, voice, and culture in the name of assimilation has proved to be detrimental to Indigenous peoples today.

Loss of Land

The push for settlers to create livelihoods in Canada came from what was viewed as unused land rife with potential for agriculture and the development of towns and cities. The doctrine of discovery, comprised of papal rulings along with other international documents, recognized *terra nullius*, or lands that were empty, setting early precedent for notions of discovery (Monchalin, 2016). As Monchalin (2016) states, “These doctrines endorsed that, if any land were “empty” according to the European definition, Europeans could claim it as theirs” (p. 62). One of the earliest documented efforts to drastically change the landscape and use hunger as a weapon was

through the deliberate eradication of the bison on the prairies.⁶ While the story of the bison has been well documented and shared (Dobak, 1996; Isenberg, 1992), less attention has been paid to the role of the beaver. Beyond being a sacred animal carrying the teaching of wisdom, the beaver was also the source of fresh water (Daschuk, 2013). Freshwater systems support more life, and provided Indigenous peoples with access to water, animals, plants, and medicines. The loss of freshwater and the bison resulted in dramatic changes to the landscape, immobility, and conditions of starvation. Subsequently, Indigenous Chiefs needed to find the means to feed their people; what Daschuk (2013) argues are part of the politics of starvation.

Early changes to the landscape were also made for the introduction of agriculture, a means to work the lands for settler survival and also to use the land to declare ownership. Theorist John Locke provided further rationale for European conquest through the concept of agrarian labor, giving those that effectively worked the land reason to dispossess Indigenous peoples of their lands (Monchalin, 2016). The collision between the values and worldviews of Indigenous peoples and European settlers is evident here. In an Indigenous worldview, land is part of a collective. It belongs to no one person or group of peoples. As a gift from Creator, our responsibility is to ensure the continuation of the land for future generations. There is a deeply reciprocal element to this worldview: in taking care of the land, land provides us with the gifts of life, and the cycle continues.

Today our lands are, in many cases, unhealthy, unsafe, and unstable for future human habitation (LaDuke [Anishinaabe], 2016; Waziyatawin [Dakota], 2012). Indigenous peoples have long predicted the consequences of land as commodity:

⁶ Robin Wall Kimmerer [Potawatomi] (2013) has discussed the cultural devastation due to the loss of the cedar through deforestation efforts on the west coast as being similar to the loss of the bison. This has also been said for salmon in Ontario and in British Columbia (Simpson, 2017).

You know our prophecies told us that this was all going to happen. That these different people would show up, which is exactly what happened. The other thing is that we already had a worldview. We already had an understanding of how we were supposed to relate to everything – with every other being, or everything that we're a part of as a people. (Robidoux et al., 2017, p. XV)

The depletion of lands coupled with the introduction of foreign and chemical substances to the soils, water, and atmosphere has resulted in a multitude of human health related issues (LaDuke, 2014). Moreover, entire species are being eradicated, water is running out, and sea levels are rising as the result of a major, human-induced climate change. And yet, the early adopters of agrarian labor were convinced that bringing a new way of life to Canada would result in prosperity (Carter, 1990). Importantly, that prosperity was not meant for Indigenous peoples.

The health and well-being of Indigenous peoples is directly related to the health of the land (LaDuke, 2005; Lambert [Mi'kmaq/Abenaki], 2014). Recovering well-being requires a safe, secure and healthy land base: "It requires our land based not be toxic. It requires us to restore and maintain a spiritual relationship with our homeland and all the plants and animals sharing the land with us. It requires pristine water" (Waziyatawin, 2012, p. 35). When we consider all aspects of life to be in relation to one another, the energy that is spent on relationships results in nurturing; the absence of this, disconnections, results in dis-ease (Hart [Cree], 2009). The destruction of the land is part of an imbalance Indigenous peoples experience (LaDuke, 2005; Lambert, 2014; Settee [Cree], 2013). Hill (2008) explains that as human beings, we must learn to tread softly on Mother Earth to uphold the Natural Law with the universe. Colonization has interrupted natural processes by removing control from Indigenous peoples lives, livelihoods, bodies, and lands. Healing is viewed as a process to recover from colonization (Linklater

[Anishinaabe], 2014). But first, it is important to understand foundational concepts for Indigenous healing and helping practices, particularly in the area of Indigenous social work (Hart, 2009).

Foundational Concepts in Helping and Healing Practices

Ojibway Elder Jim Dumont (2014) explains that while Indigenous cultures are expressed in myriad ways, there are foundational beliefs and concepts that support a unified definition of culture. These include concepts such as the circle, the spirit, balance and harmony, all my relations, kindness, caring, respect, a connection to the environment, language, and a “path of life continuum” (p. 8). Cree scholar Michael Hart (2009) presents an Indigenous approach to social work that includes the centrality of spirituality; and supporting concepts of wholeness, balance, relationships, harmony, growth, healing, and *mino-pimatisiwin*. Kovach (2009) shares the power of the Cree culture comes from “being kind, being inclusive, being community-minded in combination with ceremonies, protocols, and ways” (p. 73). These foundational concepts are presented below.

Carroll (1998) refers to spirituality, the first foundational concept, as an intimate and personal connection with the Creator and Creation. Spirituality occurs within the self and is carried into all interactions. It extends outwards to the living and non-living world. Anishinaabe healer Calvin Morrisseau (1998) shares how we can create our own spirituality, but that it begins with acknowledging there is a power greater than us. We must be able to recognize the existence of Creator and learn how to ask for help (Morrisseau, 1998). Spirituality is critical to healing programs and pathways, and is necessary on the path towards well-being (McCormick [Mohawk], 2009). Hill (2008) shares that spirituality is entwined with an understanding of traditional healing; they are one and the same. Hart (2009) shares how Indigenous spirituality can be demonstrated through worldviews and philosophies. He points to respectful individualism

and communitism as being key concepts contained within an Indigenous worldview. While respectful individualism refers to freedom, growth, and exploration within one's self, it is also connected to a larger picture. Individuals working towards this internal growth "have a great responsibility for the collective well-being of the people and the life around them" (Hart, 2009, p. 35). Communitism acknowledges the connections that occur between people and the commitment to maintain the relationships one has with family and community (Hart, 2009).

The second foundational concept, wholeness, refers to the idea that we are made up of connections and interconnections to life around and within us. Leroy Little Bear (2000) explains wholeness as part of a larger philosophy that includes the cosmos: "The value of wholeness speaks to the totality of Creation, the group as opposed to the individual, the forest as opposed to individual trees. It focuses on the totality of the constant flux rather than individual patterns" (p. 79).

Balance, the third foundational concept, occurs when a person applies attention to all four elements of being: mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional (Svenson & Lafontaine, 1999). The idea of balance extends outwards, into family, community and "natural and Creator's laws" (Svenson & Lafontaine, 1999, p. 190). Balance is often explained through the medicine wheel, an ancient symbol used to represent First Nations worldviews (Svenson & Lafontaine, 1999). Medicine wheels are circular in shape and divided into four sections; a line runs through the top to bottom and then through the middle from side to side. The four equal parts of the circle are said to represent the four directions (north, south, east and west) coinciding with the four races (white, black, red, and yellow) amongst other teachings (Bopp et al., 2003; Regnier, 1994). Mawhiney and Nabigon [Anishinaabe] (2011) also share the medicine wheel as a healing tool. With a focus on the Cree medicine wheel, the authors state that the four directions can be used as

guides for people to rediscover and follow the way back to their own paths. Dis-ease occurs when the four elements of being are imbalanced. Numerous Indigenous authors have also shared the medicine wheel in their work in Indigenous health, well-being, and as treatment (see Coggins [Ojibwa and Ottawa], (1990); Lavallée [Anishinaabe], 2007; Mehl-Madrona [Cherokee], 2005).

Relationships are said to be another foundational concept of Indigenous healing and helping (Hart, 2009). Relationships exist in and among people, their surroundings and all of Creation. They highlight the connected aspects of our lives and the ways that we relate to other things, living and non. McKenzie and Morrisette [Anishinaabe] (2003) offer six connected, metaphysical beliefs from which relationship to the environment is derived:

all things exist according to the principles of survival; the act of survival pulses with the natural energy and cycles of the earth; this energy is part of some grand design; all things have a role to perform to ensure balance and harmony and the overall well-being of life; all things are an extension of the grand design and, as such, contain the same essence as the source from which it flows (Gitchi-Manitou); and this essence is understood as ‘spirit’ which links all things to each other and to Creation. (p. 259)

Nations and individuals are spiritually unique because of the myriad and specific relationships one has with the local environment, geography, plants, and animals (Stonechild, 2016).

Harmony, another key concept captured by Indigenous philosophies such as the Medicine Wheel, refers to the process of fulfilling our obligations to each other and ourselves (Hart, 2009). Cree scholar Willie Ermine (1995) explains how the concept of harmony is deeply embedded within a larger epistemology that goes far back in time. He explains how, through ancient processes of attaining knowledge the,

Old Ones had experienced totality, a wholeness, in inwardness, and effectively created a physical manifestation of the life force by creating community.... each part of the community became an integral part of the whole flowing movement and was modeled on the inward wholeness and harmony. (p. 105/106)

Growth, as a key concept, recognizes change as a natural part of life. The concept of growth also reflects the possibility of change, especially as one learns to support and improve their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being (Bopp et al., 2003). Again, nature is a driving force and the foundation of understanding knowledge creation, generation, and regeneration.

Hart (2009) explains that healing is “a daily practice that is oriented to the restoration of wholeness, balance, relationships, and harmony” (p. 36). Morrisseau (1998) shares that Indigenous healing contains self in relation to others- community, land, nation, and relationships. He positions holistic healing as a model for moving forward (Morrisseau, 1998).

Mino-pimatisiwin, or the good life, is the final foundational concept presented in a Cree approach to helping and healing. In living a life of growth, harmony and healing, one can work towards *mino pimatisiwin* (Hart, 2002; Hart, 2008). Indeed, the foundational concepts, values, and worldviews presented throughout this section are critical to achieving *mino pimatiwisin*. Hart (2008) explains that *mino pimatisiwin* represents “life in the fullest, healthiest sense” (p. 134). Key values of *mino pimatisiwin* (2008) include respect, sharing, and spirituality.

Other Cree Concepts

Cree concepts are only partially captured in the literature; however, Cree scholars have shared the following. Through her work with Cree Elders, Makokis [Cree] (2001) describes

the Cree concept of Natural Law. Cree Natural Laws are the inherent laws that help direct Cree people towards living a good life. They include *mahtahitowin* (sharing), *sohkeyitamowin* (strength/determination), *sakihtowin* (love), and *kwayaskatisiwin* (honesty) (Makokis, 2005). Sylvia McAdam [Cree] (2015) shares how Cree natural laws provide an important foundation for social work-based interventions with Indigenous peoples, highlighting their importance in understanding the impacts of trauma, violence, addictions and separation of culture. Stonechild (2016) also presents The Great Law of Relationships or *miyo-wîcêhtowin*. *Miyo-wîcêhtowin*,

has its roots in the Great Principle that we are spirit beings on a physical journey. Having assumed physical being and the separateness this implies, there is an imperative to restore unity among living things. In Cree the doctrine is *wâhkôhtowin*, mending the separation caused by physical existence. (p. 69)

Neal McLeod [Cree] (2007) shares the concept of *miyo-wîcihitowin* or “helping each other in a good way” through reciprocal relationships (p. 35). *Wâhkotowin* refers to the state of all things being related: “*wâhkotowin* highlights the significance of community and emphasizes the importance of going beyond the individual to the collective” (Barker, 2020, p. 53). These foundational concepts lay the groundwork for understanding Indigenous healing.

Understanding Indigenous Trauma

In order to begin the discussion of Indigenous healing, it is necessary to examine some of the terms found in the literature that attempt to describe the particular conditions and experiences that have resulted from colonialism. Trauma, for Indigenous peoples, has been described in the following ways.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder was first articulated to describe the trauma faced by Vietnam War Veterans. The American Psychiatric Association recognized this “shell shock”

in 1980 (Denham, 2008). There are a series of interpretations and expansions of PTSD; however, an examination of PTSD is beyond the scope of this project. Also, as Kimberly Hart [Cree] (2014, citing Evans-Campbell, 2008) notes, “the issue that arises within the literature is that the diagnosis of PTSD may not encompass the full extent of the trauma experienced by the Indigenous populations” (p. 32). In particular, PTSD fails to address the intergenerational trauma that Indigenous peoples have experienced; does not locate individuals and their trauma in the context of family or community; and does not explore how trauma expressed currently is connected to historical trauma (Evans-Campbell, 2008).

Lakota scholar Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart [Hunkpapa/Oglala Lakota] (1998) introduced the concepts of historical unresolved grief and historical trauma for American Indians. Brave Heart and DeBruyn (1998) explain that these terms help to better understand destructive behaviours and social problems facing Native American communities. They argue that the loss of land through development and dispossession along with practices and experiences of starvation, disease, boarding and residential schools, and assimilation policies have resulted in loss and trauma as a result of the pain and suffering that was experienced. Historical trauma refers to, “the legacy of numerous traumatic events a community experiences over generations and encompasses the psychological and social responses to such events” (Evans- Campbell, 2008 citing Brave Heart, 1998, p. 320).

In Canada, the term intergenerational trauma is used to refer to the collective experience that Indigenous peoples endured through colonization, and in particular the commonalities of experiences through the Sixties Scoop and residential schools (Bombay [Ojibway] et al., 2009; Gagne, 1998; Quinn, 2007). Bombay et al. (2009) note, “there is now considerable evidence that the effects of trauma experiences are often transmitted across generations,

affecting children and grandchildren of those that were initially victimized” (p. 6). At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that after everything, Indigenous peoples are still here, that Indigenous cultures are still in practice. We are not only traumatized.

Indigenous Healing

Healing, as a practice and way of life, has been foundational in the lives of Indigenous peoples. Not only does healing speak to the spirit of Indigenous peoples, particularly in the recovery from colonization, but it highlights the strength of Indigenous culture (Hart, 2014). Healing is a historic practice. Healers, helpers, medicine people, and Elders all played significant roles in supporting the well-being of Indigenous communities prior to colonization. However, these same historical and traditional healing and helping practices were outlawed through colonial policies (Manitowabi [Ojibwe] & Shawande, 2012). Importantly, traditional healing practices and medicines were not surrendered by First Nations peoples in signing the treaties (Sasakamoose [Ojibwe] et al., 2017). Lavalley and Poole (2009) argue that it is important to look beyond Western notions of health and towards traditional healing practices:

An Indigenous healing model admits that the wounded identity of Indigenous people needs to be addressed by allowing people to learn about their spiritual and cultural conditions, instilling Native pride so people will want to self-identify and learn about their culture, and most importantly, passing this healthy behaviour down to the next seven generations. (p. 279)

Indigenous scholars have offered caution in examining the ways that Indigenous healing is presented. Hill and Coady (2003) explain that “there is no clearly defined Aboriginal theory of healing” because healing knowledges are stored in oral traditions and because Indigenous cultures are dynamic (p. 53). Robbins & Dewar (2011) explain the challenge of

defining Indigenous healing is threefold: 1) healing and medicine knowledges tend to be passed down orally; 2) Indigenous languages are vast and healing knowledges are contained within these languages that do not translate into English; and 3) the use of the word “traditional” is problematic in “that [it] does not engage the full spectrum of knowledge interpretation that Elders and healers have to offer” (p. 2). Importantly, healing is not a development project for Indigenous communities. Cree Métis scholar Emma LaRocque (2010) shares that “healing” should not be used loosely: “We cannot, must not, etherealize our colonized history or our colonized condition in the name of beauty, faith or even desire for “healing” (p.159). Eduardo Duran [Apache and Lakota] (2006) argues that therapists working with Indigenous peoples in healing capacities must acknowledge the language of Indigenous healing in western constructs. This language includes the role the therapist may play in engaging and supporting colonizing therapies: “In addition, the therapists then can discuss the issues of historical trauma and acknowledge their complicity in being part of the historical perpetrator. This historical honesty will greatly enhance the healing process while utilizing standard therapies” (Duran, 2006, p. 2).

Despite Robbins and Dewar’s (2011) caution in using the term traditional, many Elders and scholars have referred to healing and medicine practices as traditional (Duran, 2006; Morriveau, 1998; Nabigon, 2006; Young et al., 2015) and thus, I use the term traditional moving forward. Linklater (2014) uses the term holistic healing to describe the inherently spiritual, decolonizing processes that recognize the interconnectedness of spirit, family, and community. Indigenous healing involves a number of elements that vary from nation to nation and are entwined in colonial histories. Main elements of Indigenous healing are presented below.

Identity

Identity is a large focus of healing work (Lavalleé & Fairney [Anishinaabe], 2014), in large part due to loss of identity associated with colonization. Couture [Cree] (1996) describes Native identity as “being a state of mind, as it were, centred in the heart” (p. 42). Elder Vern Harper [Cree] (2014) shares that in order to heal, Indigenous peoples must learn who they are. Identity work involves spiritual development and re-examining internal and external relationships (McGuire–Kishebakabaykwe [Anishinaabe], 2010). Roles, responsibilities, and purpose can be understood through ceremony, understanding traditional naming processes and walking the sweetgrass road (Nabigon, 2006). Similarly, Lavalleé and Fairney (2014) describe “helping Aboriginal youth identify with strong Aboriginal community is most important in the healing process” (p. 128). Yet, despite the importance of identity in supporting health, there is often a lack of opportunities to support and assert cultural identity (Slater, 2010). Indigenous social work aims to address these gaps. In an early contribution to Indigenous social work, Morrisette et al. (1993) describe four characteristics of an Indigenous model of social work practice. These characteristics include recognition of an Indigenous worldview; the advancement of Indigenous consciousness of colonial impacts; maintaining conscious Indigenous identity through cultural knowledges; and the practice of empowerment in order to move beyond the dominant, non-Indigenous paradigm. Further works by Absolon, 2011, Adams et al., 2017, Baikie [Inuit], 2009, Hart, 2008, and Wabie [Algonquin-Anishinaabe] et al., 2021 are some examples that speak to the myriad forms of interlap between Indigenous identity and Indigenous social work.

Elders

Cultural identity and healing can be supported through learning from and working with Elders. Elders, Knowledge Holders, Knowledge Keepers, Grandmothers and

Grandfathers⁷ offer important guidance, lessons, and knowledge to help Indigenous peoples understand their roles within community and culture (Simpson, 2002). In order to bridge western and traditional knowledge systems there is a great need for Elders in learning, helping and healing spaces (McKenzie & Morrisette, 2003). Makokis (2001) shares the ways that Elders and healing intersect:

Elders have a tremendous responsibility as the conduits of this store of traditional knowledge and skills. The transmission (teaching) and acquisition (learning) occurred within the mediums of stories, ceremonies and the traditional practices are inherent in daily living. Spiritual leaders and Elders often had specific responsibilities for health and healing practices. A general principle of reciprocity ensured that the community responded to those affected by health and social issues pertaining to disease, hunger, child welfare and matters of social deviance and social control. (p. 53)

Manitowabi (2014) shares that Elders are able to be healers because they have done the work of healing for themselves. Thus, “Elders are able to communicate teachings in a meaningful way that facilitates the healing journey” (Manitowabi, 2014, p. 92). Elders understand and support the concept of healing in relation to family, community, nation, and the land (Morrisseau, 1998). Morrisseau (1998) positions holistic healing as a model for moving forward: “I have always heard people talking about holistic healing but have come to realize that until we make healing *all-inclusive* by including men, families, and communities, our attempts at healing will always follow short of the mark” (p. 74). In an Indigenous

⁷ The various names listed reflect the descriptions that “Elders” have been explained to me firsthand largely through the Masters of Social Work in Indigenous Knowledge program at the University of Manitoba. While I have not seen these other names adequately reflected in the research, I would be remiss to mention it here.

worldview, children are the center of the community, while Elders sit next to the children in order to share cultural and spiritual knowledges and pathways (Anderson, 2000). The connections to spirit and spirituality that Elders offer can be vital for those seeking healing; however, Elders are not the only source of healing in community. Cultural experts include “*mitew* or *keh-te-ayak* (Elders), *otisapahcikewiyiniw* (ceremonialists), *maskihkiwiyiniw* (medicine people or herbalists), and *oskapewis* (helpers)” (Sasakamoose et al., 2017, p. 5). In the Cree language, Elders are referred to as *Kété-ayak* (Hart, 2007). Elders are considered to be trustworthy, patient and valuable resources for people experiencing emotional and spiritual difficulties, with the interest of community at heart (Kyoon-Achan et al., 2018).

Land and Food

Relationships with and responsibilities for the land are valuable components of Indigenous healing. Food is medicine; it is needed in order to heal (Nabigon, 2006). Morrisseau (1998) describes the role of food through traditional values of sharing, respect and support. Through sharing food, one challenges any inherent selfishness and ensures we are carrying out responsibilities to our food systems and to each other. Offering food to someone going through a difficult time provides support and connection to Indigenous culture which many people find grounding (Morrisseau, 1998). In their work examining Cree health, Graham and Stamler (2010) discovered participants’ desire for traditional foods as part of their healing journeys. Food features prominently in ceremonies such as sweat lodge ceremonies, berry fasts, pipe ceremonies, naming ceremonies, the feast of the dead, and spring thanksgiving (Johnston, 1990; Partridge, 2010). Adelson (1998) references food as being critical to the James Bay Cree concept of *Miyupimaatisiun*; being well means eating Cree foods that come from the land, water and sky.

Food, in Indigenous cultures, is seen as more than sustenance, but rather the practices and relationships that Indigenous peoples have to the land and their community. In describing her experiences collecting maple syrup, Potawatomi scholar Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) describes the responsibilities that Indigenous peoples have in participating in their food systems:

Nanabozho made certain that the work will never be too easy. His teachings remind us that one half of the truth is that the earth endows us with great gifts, the other half is the gift is not enough. The responsibility does not lie with the maples alone. The other half belongs to us; we participate in its transformation. (p. 69)

Nabigon argues that “we are responsible for the quality of sustenance for the next seven generations” (Nabigon, 2006, p. 61). Strong food relationships require connecting to a larger life force. Land is critical to this area of healing. Within the field of health geography, the concept of therapeutic landscapes presents an important opportunity to connect place with healing (Wilson, 2003) although the concept feels lacking in its understanding of place and Indigenous personhood (including roles, responsibilities, naming, clan systems). McGuire–Kishebakabaykwe (2010) postulates that Indigenous knowledges and Indigenous resiliency⁸ stem from the land, a theory she calls “Indigenous place-based resilience” (p. 123). Simpson (2008) explains how land has always been a source of healing:

In the times prior to colonization, Indigenous peoples lived in independent, sovereign nations governed by complex political and social systems. Rooted in the land, with a strong spiritual and religious foundation, these systems ensured

⁸ There is controversy in the term resiliency (Dion Stout & Kipling, 2003; Newhouse [Six Nations], 2006). See Durie (2006), a Maori scholar, for a definition of Indigenous resilience.

our citizens were taken care of and that contentious issues were resolved in a peaceful and just manner. (p. 13)

Land contains original instructions for our well-being. However, we must make the effort to engage with the land.

Gender

Roles and responsibilities that Indigenous peoples carry through their family, clan systems, spirit names, spirituality, and community often reflect traditional ideas about gender. In cultures across the world, women have historically taken the role of healers (Struthers [Anishinaabe], 2000). However, Indigenous women's historic roles as healers have been largely overlooked. Rather, European patriarchal worldviews focused on the idea of medicine men (Struthers, 2000). Civilized gendered roles for Indigenous women and men were articulated through the work of missionaries who considered it their responsibility to train boys and men for physical labour, while girls and women were trained for domestic work (Starblanket [Cree/Saulteaux], 2017). This is in sharp contrast to an Indigenous context where "the gendered division of roles and responsibilities in life on the land are often rationalized by the notion of balance or complementarity" (Starblanket, 2017, p. 30).

For many Indigenous communities in Canada, women historically held positions in community governance. This changed with the Indian Act, that outlawed women from voting and running for leadership in their communities; women were not allowed to even speak at public meetings (Anderson, 2000). Through their governance, women were tasked with supporting and maintaining the overall health of the community (Anderson, 2000, Anderson; 2011; Monchalin, 2016). This extra level of responsibility, to undertake the care of a community, is often presented through women's life-giving abilities. Women are seen as nurturers (Anderson, 2000). At the same time, women carry the legacy of past naming:

“beasts of burden, squaws, traitors, or, at best, vanished denizens of a long-lost wilderness” (Gunn Allen [Laguna Pueblo], 1992, p. 214). This carries particular resonance today in understanding violence against Indigenous women who are “three times more likely than non-Indigenous women to become a victim of a violent crime in Canada” (Monchalin, 2016, p.175). Muskogee Creek scholar Sarah Deer (2005) argues that protecting women means addressing community wellness: “For sovereign tribal nations, the question is not just about protecting and responding to individual women who are sexually assaulted but also addressing the foundational wellness of the community where it occurs....” (p. 465). These dual or myriad oppressions exist at the intersections⁹ of Indigenous womanhood in a colonial environment.

Writing of Indigenous masculinities and healing, Antone [Haudenosaunee] (2015) explains the history of the healing movement as being driven largely by women. He wonders, “Where were the men? What was preventing them from accessing this phenomenon of healing?” (p. 26). Antone (2015) argues that colonialism has interfered with this process for Indigenous men who were historically the protectors and providers for their clan families. The loss of identity that has occurred for Indigenous men has been further hindered through conflicts such as the Oka standoff, which positioned men as violent warriors (Antone, 2015). Not surprisingly, writes Henry [Métis] (2015), the loss of Indigenous male identity has resulted in a need for a sense of belonging. For young men in particular, belonging can be found in street gangs, a challenge facing Indigenous communities across the country. Belonging can also be found in traditional ceremonies to help mark the passage into manhood

⁹ Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989 & 1991) devised the term intersectionality to describe her work on the discrimination Black women face in their workplaces. Crenshaw felt that neither gender nor race alone adequately described the racialized sexism Black women were experiencing. The term has evolved to include the many axes of power, privilege, and oppression that people face.

(Adams [Yadhiagana/Wuthathi] et al., 2017). Adams et al. (2017) share that for traditional Aboriginal, Maori, and Hawaiian societies, “song, dance, ocher and painting are used as a boy comes into and out of the secret and traditional world of male law” (p. 48). These ceremonies must be kept in practice, however, and made accessible to young men in need of healing. Working against colonized gender is a large undertaking for men, women and two-spirit peoples. Indigenous healing must also take place in political spaces in order to reclaim gender from colonization.

Ceremony

Sasakamoose et al. (2017) explain ceremony through practicing values and connecting with oneself: “Indigenous practice in any ceremony is the act of gratitude and seeking kindness, humility and guidance from the ancestors” (p. 8). In describing the work of a healer, Cree healer Russell Willier highlights the importance of spirituality: “The primary role of a healer is to help people who approach him in the correct way, asking for help and guidance from the Great Spirit” (Young et al., 2015, p. 7). Morse et al. (1991) describe five components of the ceremonial structure of a Cree healer:

- 1) the ritual component which refers to the participation of the patient with Creator and spirit helpers; 2) the contract component where one asks for healing through the use of tobacco and cloth; 3) treatment component which includes medicines (topical and tea), and ceremony; 4) didactic component where the healer instructs the patient on care practices for home; and 5) closure component in which it is understood that the Creator and spirit helpers are always there (p. 1363).

Healing circles, talking circles and sharing circles encourage participants to share and let go of emotions while also connecting with others (Stevenson, 1999). Hart (2002) also writes of sharing circles, explaining the format of the circle:

When I participated in sharing circles, there were times when other participants referred to the circle as a healing circle. Neither the conductors nor any other participants made a correction that the circles were not healing circles. It was my impression that if a participant wanted to call a particular circle a healing circle, it was up to them. (p. 89)

Makosis (2001) shares the importance of traditional Cree ceremonies such as the Pipe ceremony, Give Away ceremony, and Chicken Dance ceremony. She states that “through ceremony we learn what our role and responsibility is to our people and it is this role that keeps us relationally accountable and on the path of living the “good life,” *miyo pimatisiwin*” (p. 47). Ceremony is important in healing journeys, at an individual level and also in the way that people come together to heal:

Healing is often in the form of a community-sanctioned and community-run cleansing ceremony that involves the whole community. Even in the case of individual problems, connections with family, community and the larger environment often hold the keys to understanding the problems and facilitating the healing. (McCormick, 2009, p. 339)

Ceremonies are also metaphorical in their teachings. Anderson (2000) shares the story of Carol Couchie, an Ojibway midwife, “who interprets the sweat lodge ceremony as a metaphor for birth. The dome-shaped lodge has often been equated with the womb

of mother earth” (p. 164/165). These understandings are necessary in helping to build stronger relationships with Creation.

Focus on relationships, connections, and strong value systems are key features of Indigenous healing. Ceremony helps to bring those ideas to light. Since healing practices, values, and traditions vary from nation to nation, this literature review is not exhaustive. Some of those elements are more important for some people than others, and thus healing journeys will be unique to individuals.

Indigenous Food Sovereignty

In 1996, the term food sovereignty was proposed by La Vía Campesina, an international movement of small farm workers, peasants, fisher peoples, and Indigenous peoples in the global south to help describe the political and economic powers in food production (Desmarais, 2007). The language of food sovereignty is deliberately political:

According to La Vía Campesina, food sovereignty is to be distinguished from food security; it is not only a question of ensuring that a sufficient amount of food is produced nationally and made accessible to everyone. Equally important is the issue of what food is produced, how it is produced, and at what scale. (Desmarais, 2007, p. 34)

The move away from food security is a powerful one. Food banks and other food security measures have been criticized as dumping grounds for less desirable food. Power (2008) has noted that food security studies lack attention to the cultural aspects of food for Indigenous peoples. These studies are based upon income levels, do not factor in consuming or sharing traditional foods, and are conducted in the English language (Power, 2008). The politics of food are of particular concern for Indigenous communities in Canada whose food and cultural systems have been altered beyond recognition through colonial processes. The

destruction of land and waters through resource extraction and industry development coupled with forced changes to Indigenous diets through the introduction of the reserve system and rations of so-called white foods are efforts by colonizer to eliminate and control Indigenous bodies (Monchalin, 2016; Rowse, 1998; Shewell, 2004). Food is inherently political for Indigenous peoples (Robin et al., 2020).

While food sovereignty works to capture the political tensions of food production, *Indigenous* food sovereignty also emphasizes a holistic, resurgent, self-determined food system. Importantly, Indigenous food sovereignty works to carry on the food practices, values, and traditions of Indigenous ancestors. Indeed, our ancestors expressed concern over the ability to hunt, trap, fish, and gather food and medicines through treaties, an important instrument to protect a way of life¹⁰. Following colonization, the land has become a political battleground. Oka, Gustafsen Lake, and Standing Rock, for example, are some of the recent spaces where Indigenous peoples have rallied to continue to protect lands from further development and represent sites of both resistance and persistence (Manuel & Derrickson, 2015).

Despite being in practice since time immemorial, Indigenous food sovereignty has only emerged in the literature in the last 20 years (Morrison, 2011). However, it is quickly growing (see for example, Mihesuah [Choctaw] & Hoover [Mohawk/Mi'kmaq], 2019; Settee & Shukla, 2020; Skinner et al., 2018). The resurgence, movement and study of Indigenous food sovereignty in Canada first arose through grassroots movements such as The BC Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty, and then later through the work of Food Secure Canada's Indigenous Circle of advisors (People's Food Policy Project (PFPP), 2011;

¹⁰ And wampum belts and other instruments meant to share resources (PFPP, 2011).

Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty (WGIFS), 2011). These groups advocated for the redistribution of land and land reform legislation so that people of the land can access food from the land in their traditional territories (PFPP, 2011; WGIFS, 2011).

In an important contribution to the literature, Secwepemc activist and writer Dawn Morrison (2011), shares four principles of Indigenous food sovereignty. These principles have become foundational to the movement in Canada: 1) food is sacred; 2) active participation of Indigenous peoples in their food systems is necessary; 3) self-determination is the key to understanding the overarching goal of IFS, and; 4) land reform and protection in Canada are needed (Morrison, 2011). Similarly, through an examination of 24 Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives in western Canada, Robin (2019) discovered four elements of Indigenous food sovereignty: food as part of a living history; connection to land is necessary for IFS; relationships amongst and between people and land are critical; and finally, IFS is part of cultural identity. Indigenous food sovereignty has also been presented through Indigenous knowledges, decolonization, and self-determination by Indigenous scholars (Coté, 2016; Daigle [Cree], 2017; Cidro & Martens, 2014; Robin, 2019). The theoretical underpinnings of Indigenous food sovereignty are values-based, holistic, local, contextual, decolonizing and Indigenizing (Coté, 2016; Daigle, 2019; Morrison, 2011; Robin, 2019).

In practice, Indigenous food sovereignty looks different across the country with changing geographies, histories, and nations. Daigle (2017) has referred to the various expressions of Indigenous food sovereignty as *sovereignties*. Expressions of Indigenous food sovereignty include community endeavors such as community freezers, kitchens and community and family gardens (Levi [Anishinaabe], 2020; Gilpin [Saulteaux-Cree/Métis] & Hayes [WJOLELP], 2020). For example, the Shkagamik-Kwe Health Centre in Ontario operates a

wild-foods bank for people to access traditional foods such as moose meat (Ray [Anishinaabe] et al., 2019). Indigenous food sovereignty extends beyond the production and consumption of food. Rather, IFS privileges the protection of land. The works of Winona LaDuke's IFS efforts have long been documented (LaDuke, 2016). Importantly, these efforts have resulted in the establishment of legal rights for wild rice, the Rights of *Manoomin* in the United States. In Canada, IFS has also worked to document the devastating impacts of the oil industry on Indigenous communities in Alberta through the Creation of a local, Indigenous-led biomonitoring program (McLachlan, 2014). Indigenous food sovereignty is based on the concept of an Indigenous food system which includes all living things, and the processes and practices of their interactions (Morrison, 2011). Indigenous food systems thus extend to include ceremony, language, songs, and art, along with family and clan systems, and the continued enhancement of Indigenous nations.

The colonization of Indigenous lands and food systems has been detrimental to the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples in Canada (Daschuk, 2013; Kelm, 1999; Lux, 2001; McCallum, 2017; McLachlan, 2014; Mosby, 2013; Shewell, 2004; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Indigenous food systems and the spiritual and cultural components that support and invigorate our food systems are in need of attention. This is an example of healing in context: the result of a colonized food system is more trauma and loss. Despite the desire of Indigenous food sovereignty to work towards decolonization, little attention has been paid to the social development aspects of Indigenous food sovereignty. A recent outlier from Ray and colleagues (2019) argues for the need to create policies that address the linkages between food, culture, land, and health for Indigenous peoples. Too often, Indigenous food sovereignty is seen as a response to food insecurity, and not the

dysfunctional and oppressive policies that continue to harm Indigenous peoples and their food systems today (Dennis [Athabaskan] & Robin, 2020). These discourses contribute to a continuation of romanticizing Indigenous food and land relationships rather than the critical work of anti-colonialism and anti-racism.

Indigenous food sovereignty and Indigenous healing are acts of cultural and political resurgence (Simpson, 2017); yet the connection between these areas has yet to be explored. Both require self-determination, a connection to the land, spirit, and Creation, and will vary from nation to nation. There is a need for government bodies to work together to support environmental and food challenges facing Indigenous peoples as part of social development. Rather than existing in silos, departments such as agriculture, forestry, land, water, health, social services and Indigenous and Northern Affairs must come to the table to work with Indigenous peoples. In this case, they must come to Indigenous tables. In the meantime, we will continue to reclaim our food ways and feed our people, as we have always done. The next chapter will outline the research approach taken to better understand the voices and food stories of the Elder participants.

Chapter 3: Research Design

Over the last 30 years, Indigenous scholars have championed Indigenous research methodologies, processes, and paradigms (Absolon, 2011; Archibald, 2008; Brant Castellano [Mohawk], 2004; Cidro et al., 2020; Gilchrist, 1997; Hart, 2010; Smith, 2012). Absolon (2011) has referred to Indigenous research as re-search, a place where we come to find ourselves and what we know and do not know. Smith (2012) argues that Indigenous peoples want to offer their own stories in their own ways, “rewriting and a rerighting our position in history” (p. 28). It is no longer enough for research methodologies to offer guidance into culturally appropriate research designs, but instead to privilege those designs that are culturally inherent (Simpson, 2002). Starting with researcher preparation, Indigenous scholars have suggested the need to spend time on the land, gather information, and situate themselves in their research (Absolon & Willet, 2005; Kovach, 2009; Lambert, 2014) and include methods of culturally inherent data analysis such as working with textiles (Absolon, 2011) and/or metaphors (Lavallée, 2007). Indigenous scholars have offered numerous examples of culturally inherent, respectful research that honours the voices of their participants (Wilson, 2008). These ideas are further examined in this chapter.

My research project is qualitative in nature, using an Indigenous research paradigm consisting of an epistemology, methodology, axiology and protocol (Graveline [Cree Métis], 2000; Hart, 2010; Kovach, 2005; Wilson, 2008). Hart (2007) explains such terms are not rooted in Indigenous worldviews, questioning whether the use of such concepts is actually relevant, particularly in advancing the goals of self-determination. And yet, these terms feel necessary in

the continual fight to have Indigenous research methodologies recognized as valid or rigorous. Referring to Indigenous researchers, Weber-Pillwax [Cree] (2004) shares, “The challenges that some of us may not be well prepared to face are those associated with what seems to be recognized in the academy as ‘acceptable’ scholarly research with definitions and descriptions from within a specific discipline” (p. 78). Despite a burgeoning interest in Indigenous research methodologies, Indigenous researchers are still having to confront and defend the legitimacy of their approaches and epistemologies (Anderson & Cidro, 2019). Yet, “Indigenous research methodology is and has always been the central structure of support for the Creation of indigenous knowledge” (Weber-Pillwax, 1999, p. 31).

An Indigenous Research Framework

A number of central tenets support an Indigenous research framework. Importantly, I begin with an Indigenous theory based on *affect* and experience as a *felt* reality (Million, 2013). Food has been and will always be an affective experience; food, and the ways we have been fed, affects us as Indigenous peoples. This includes the horrific experience of hunger, both spiritual and physical, of a colonized food system, and also, the healing powers of food as spirit, and as life force. At the same time, the presence of traditional healing, ceremonial, and food practices is also experiential. My own location as a mixed Swampy Cree woman means that the way I see this re-search (Absolon, 2011) is through a Cree lens informed by my experiences as a Cree person. I am learning about ceremonies and Cree food systems, both academically and through an embodied experience. I have also been the recipient of food as healer in my work with many of the Elders that participated in this study. Self in research is critical in Indigenous research: not only is it practical for me to work from a Cree context, it is harmonious to the re-search itself (Kovach, 2009). I bring into this research my experience of working with, and in connection to, the Cree Elders that have supported my healing. Thus, to better understand my own role in the

research process and to refine the focus of understanding the specificities of healing to a local level, I chose to work with Cree Elders. Their work as helpers and healers had been already visible to me.

Epistemology, or the theory of how we come to know, is based upon Cree lived experience; and, lessons from food and land shared by Cree Elders are presented in this research (Hart, 2010; Weber-Pillwax, 1999). Hart (2010) articulates that an epistemology “includes a subjectively based process for knowledge development and a reliance on Elders and individuals who have or are developing this insight” (p. 8). Hansen [Cree] (2013) states that “the value of sharing food and knowledge is part of *Omushkegowuk* culture” (p. 123). An important aspect of my research has been the role and value of spirituality. Indigenous spirituality, and knowledges derived through spiritual understandings are significant ways of knowing shared by Elders in this research.

Wilson (2008) has described methodology as “the theory of how knowledge is gained, or in other words the science of finding things out” (p. 34). Indigenous methodologies are said to be relational (Wilson, 2001; Rowe et al., 2020) and include a commitment to the collective (Kovach, 2005) through accountability and reciprocity (Hart, 2010). Indigenous methodologies are part of a larger paradigm, one that will help guide and support the process of one’s research (Kovach, 2009). According to Wilson (2008), “The shared aspect of an Indigenous axiology and methodology is accountability to relationships” (p. 7). Indigenous research methodologies are often presented through the R: respect, reciprocity, relevance, and responsibility, as borrowed from Kirkness [Cree] and Barnhardt’s (2001) work in Indigenous education. Wilson (2008) has added relationality and relational accountability to the methodological mix, and together these R values have been well presented in the literature (Hart, 2010; Kovach, 2009; Weber-Pillwax,

2004; Wilson, 2001). What is lacking; however, are the descriptions for how these values (respect, reciprocity, relevance, responsibility, relationality, and relational accountability) are operationalized. It is not merely enough to state the values that have guided research processes, but it is also important to describe how.

In operation, this research project applied the R values as follows. Relational accountability ensures researchers demonstrate responsibility to their relationships, and not just with participants, but with all of Creation. This occurs through respectful protocols such as offering tobacco and cloth, gifting, and sharing food (Wilson, 2008). Responsibility is also demonstrated through transparency and accuracy in working with participants to ensure the story that is told is reflective of their realities. This includes ensuring participants are included throughout the research process, from responding to their written transcripts to responding to the results as they have been interpreted by the researcher. Carlson (2017) points to the need for settler researchers to acknowledge the land itself, and carry practices that support and respect the land; however, this is not limited only to settlers. The land is an important consideration that must be carried into all Indigenous scholarship: How do we demonstrate our responsibility to the land, the source of knowledge, in using Indigenous research methodologies? For me, this includes considering consumption and waste in my research. How could I best live in harmony with the land that provides for me while I conducted this research? One example is that rather than provide paper copies of materials and given the reliance on technology as we began sheltering in place, digital copies were provided to all participants. Though paper copies were offered via mail, digital copies were requested and preferred by most. All tobacco offered was natural tobacco, a small privilege to have access to given the high cost as compared to cigarette tobacco. The offering of tobacco is part of respectful protocol. According to Wilson

[Anishinaabe] and Restoule [Anishinaabe] (2010), the transference of tobacco activates relationship. Meaningful and relevant research is *respectful* research (Hart, 2010). Not only was this research project aiming to fill a critical gap in social work, food, and health studies, but it became an opportunity to document the ways that this research intersected with the realities of a global pandemic that has left Indigenous communities facing exacerbated levels of food insecurity (Levi & Robin, 2020).

Research Methods

In this section, I describe my research methods: What was done, how it was done, who was involved, and my means of analysis. However, in order to begin, I must first provide some context to my chosen methods and how my research process changed in light of a global pandemic.

The Context

On March 12, 2020 the first case of COVID-19 was reported in Manitoba by the provincial government. Within the following week, the University closed its campuses, moved in person classes to online and university guidelines indicated that researchers should not be meeting with research participants in person. Moreover, health guidelines provided by the provincial government instituted stay at home orders. Many Indigenous peoples and communities in Manitoba are considered high risk due to previous health factors and a whole host of other challenges, ranging from a lack of housing to acceptably social distance to a lack of adequate water and sanitation (Levi & Robin, 2020). Aware of the precarious nature of reserve communities, and indeed, the larger Indigenous community in Manitoba, I chose, with the support of my advisor and Elders, to conduct all future interviews via phone. One interview took place in person prior to the pandemic. However, the rest of the interviews took place over the phone. All Elders were in support of the adjustment given the circumstances; they also stated

their preference was to have met in person. My own teachings as a *Muskegowuk* (Swampy Cree) tell me that offering tobacco and cloth is necessary to begin asking an Elder to share with me. Indeed, these offerings of respect and reciprocity, an awareness of my commitment, are part of my methodology.

I had a number of reservations using phone-based interviews; these concerns were largely mitigated over time. In moving my interviews to phone-based, I struggled with connecting to my participants. I had tobacco and cloth that I could not offer. How do you connect with someone in spirit when you cannot see them?¹¹ How can I show that my heart is here, that I am present? Some of the interviews were fluid, and the conversation moved easily. But others felt clunky. I wanted to be at a kitchen table, having tea, and listening. I wanted to be in ceremony or on the land for these conversations. Certainly, I wanted to be in community, to be in community with the people who shared their stories with me. I realized that just because we could not meet in person now, it did not mean I could not continue my relationships with the participants once it was safer to do so. Indeed, as the summer progressed, arrangements were made to meet in person when safe. Each Elder was offered an option to decide how I should offer the tobacco and cloth. In some cases, we prayed together over the phone. I was asked to hold and speak to the tobacco that I could not offer in person. I was also asked to head to the land, and then to offer my tobacco and cloth through prayer while I was there. In other cases, I was asked to keep it in my possession for the next time we saw each other or to mail it. For all of my concerns, spirituality was still present. I was present and so were the participants.

At the time of this writing, we are still in lockdown in what some refer to as the third wave of the virus. It may take years for life pre-pandemic to operate as it did. It becomes

¹¹ 2020 was the year of the zoom meeting, however, this was not an option for most of the Elders largely due to unstable Internet connections.

important, then, to describe and situate Indigenous research methodologies in these changing circumstances. More researchers should be willing to articulate how the values of Indigenous research have been maintained during COVID-19. We need more opportunities to learn about how, as Indigenous peoples, we adapt to changing cultural norms in this era of social distancing. Our research practices must extend towards keeping people safe while still capturing the pandemic and other stories and experiences of Indigenous peoples in Canada.

The Methods

Despite the change from research in person to research via phone, I attempted to adhere to Kovach's (2010) conversational methodologies, which describe the co-creation of knowledge through "dialogic participation that holds a deep purpose of sharing story as a means to assist others. It is relational at its core" (p. 40). For me, this meant listening at the forefront and presenting myself as a learner. However, the Elders did not let me off the hook quite so easily. I was asked repeatedly to describe what my thoughts were on what they shared, or pre-interview, how I understood food or ceremony. In many cases, I was asked to repeat what was said or told to call back after I had some time to think about what was shared. Listening with my whole being afforded me the opportunity to continuously reflect, and as the interviews went on, I began to build on what others had said. This was especially true for ceremonial knowledge and for knowledge that was shared in the language. For example, learning the Cree names of the berries was a building block that enabled me to ask other questions about the language. In these cases, I took a slow, steady approach, and offered my tobacco. Many Elders expressed remorse at not being able to experience ceremonies or food work on the ground, in ceremony, and together. But I understood the "homework" they were assigning me – the reflections, follow up calls, offerings, the readings or directions to engage in land-based learning and observation – were

how they were making the re-search a more experiential process despite COVID. It also held me accountable.

As a co-contributor to the knowledge that was shared, I offered what little I knew and shared my experience of having a blood disease and working with Indigenous healers and helpers. Many of the Elders I spoke with were already aware of this challenge in my life and were part of a circle of care that I sought out as part of the work of my own healing. Indeed, within Indigenous communities, taking the time to listen, show up, and when appropriate share of yourself is key: “In Indigenous communities (both urban and rural), a relationship-based approach is a practical necessity because access to the community is unlikely unless time is invested in relationship building” (Kovach, 2005, p. 30). My previous relationships with many of the Elders created a new space for engagement (Appendix A outlines my script for asking the Elders to participate). Being able to ask questions about in context examples was very helpful in speaking with the Elders. At first, I was nervous about being asked what I knew; but, I quickly realized it was a way of relating to each other and to the knowledge itself. This was a way for the Elders to see me in the context of my work: what ceremonies did I know, for example? And then later, was I doing the work that was asked of me?

Research Participants

My initial proposal was to interview Cree Elders from Manitoba who I had previously worked with in helping, healing, and food work. Many of these Elders were also part of a system of support in my own healing journey. Thus, I was aware of their knowledge of Cree healing practices, languages, ceremonies, and food because I had personal experience with them. However, given the circumstances of COVID, and that I was speaking to healers, helpers, and medicine people, it became challenging to connect with some contacts because they were tending to and caring for community during this difficult time. I sat with my advisor, who is also a

respected member of the Cree community, to come up with a list of Cree Elders that I could reach out to. Gaps were also filled through Elders recommending other Elders with whom I could speak. Some may consider this method to be purposive sampling, but in an Indigenous context, the establishment of relationships and use of previous relationships is well documented (Kovach, 2009). Moreover, this practice of checking in and relating is part of cultural communication, and has also been referred to as the moccasin or bush telegraph. In the end, only two of the Elders interviewed were not known to me prior to the interview but were highly recommended by my advisor and the other Elders.

Elder knowledge is vast and critical to Indigenous cultures. Elders offer important guidance, lessons, and knowledge to help us understand our role within community and culture (Simpson, 2002). Dennis (2013) describes Elders as being recognized by their community for their leadership: “They are respected and utilized for their knowledge and wisdom about traditions and languages” (p. 9). Cross (1996) refers to the multiple roles of Elders: teachers, peacekeepers, counselors, healers, and caregivers. Elders also offer insight about how food and land can be used in supporting healing from oppression and colonial traumas (McCabe, 2008). Because Elder knowledge has been gathered over time, there is also an opportunity to learn about more historical food practices and how those practices and the land has changed over time (McCabe, 2008), providing important context for this research. The criteria for participation in this research project was as follows: self-identifies as Cree; self-identifies and/or community-identified as an Elder; live or have lived in Manitoba; identified as having a background in Indigenous helping or healing practices; identified as having knowledge of traditional food practices and teachings; agreement to participate in this research project.

In completing ethics, I was asked to remove the qualifier of agreeing to participate in this research since it was seen as redundant. However, I chose to list it here because in honouring Cree protocol, tobacco and cloth were offered to participants *prior* to the consent form, albeit virtually. This offering and the reception of the offer of tobacco signals an agreement between researcher and participant. As a *Muskegowuk*, I see this offering as superseding any written agreement that the university requires. While these agreements changed with COVID restrictions, the conversations were always led with the acknowledgement that I had tobacco and cloth to offer. Elders were then asked how they would like me to offer those materials as stated above.

Data Collection

A total of 10 participants were interviewed for this research project. Nine interviews took place over the phone (in line with COVID restrictions and safety measures stated by the university and public health), while one interview took place in person at a location identified by the participant prior to the pandemic between February and June 2020. Four participants were female, while six participants were male. All participants were from Manitoba. The original intent was to interview participants who were located in the City of Winnipeg, however, COVID made travel impossible, and many Elders were in their home communities during the stay-at-home orders. It is important to note that ceremony and family ties continue to connect Elders to their homelands regardless of where they are living; city or reserve, Manitoba or elsewhere in Canada. All conversations were audio-recorded and transcribed by me. Typed copies of the transcripts were provided back to the Elder participants for review. All edits and changes were incorporated into the transcripts. A few of the Elders also sent me written notes, slides, and other information. With their permission, that work was incorporated and synthesized along with the text. All participants were provided with an honorarium for sharing their time and knowledge.

Ethics

The principles of OCAP®, ownership, control, access and possession, for research are critical to a decolonizing and Indigenizing research approach that supports data sovereignty (First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC), 2007). OCAP principles require recognition and practice that any data or information collected belongs to the community; that Indigenous peoples have the ability and right to control all aspects of their lives that have been presented through research; that participant access to information is vital; and that ownership of data lies with the participants and communities, and research outcomes are part of self-determination (FNIGC, 2007). Consent forms, outlining OCAP, confidentiality, and the research process are found in Appendix B. Interview guide questions are found in Appendix C. Approval from the University of Manitoba Fort Garry Campus Research Ethics Board was obtained prior to conducting interviews as part of Protocol P2019:156 (HS23544). All participants signed a consent form stating their participation in the research project and outlining the project and any risks involved. They were also given the opportunity to choose anonymity and the opportunity to withdraw from the process at any time. Pseudonyms were used at the request of the participants, though some chose to have their first names used in text.

Beyond OCAP, an Indigenous ethic situates this research. That is, one based upon notions of “ethical space” as proposed by Ermine (2007); whereby we acknowledge and respect that: “each entity is molded from a distinct history, knowledge tradition, philosophy, and social and political reality” (p. 194). Much of this ethic occurs beyond the boundaries of Western research. For example, as I started the process of making meaning, I engaged in further conversations with Elders, many in text form, to help me understand key concepts or to ask questions about ideas I had. One Elder remarked that because we were now in relation, it became part of their responsibility to ensure that I was taking care during the pandemic. This has looked

like a friendship in which I am learner and the Elder is teacher; though the ethic of caring mitigates any hierarchy from these positions. Respect, relationality, and reciprocity (Wilson, 2008) are all fundamental to this research. As a Cree woman, it is a privilege to participate in conversations and ceremonial experiences with Cree Elders.

Reflecting: Self in Research

Throughout my research process, I have kept a series of notes and sketches to document my own learning. This project is undoubtedly personal: as a mixed ancestry Cree person who actively seeks to embody food work, my own story is not only relevant, but an appropriate method for Indigenous research (Wilson, 2001). Moreover, my experiences undertaking the work of healing on a personal level were informed by many of the Elders in this research, who have supported me as mentors, helpers, and medicine people. That this research project was occurring was the result of my previous work on Indigenous food systems, and my personal work on the land, and in ceremony. Those experiences provided me with the kinds of conversations I wanted to have with the Elders. I documented some of the homework that the Elders gave me as part of this research and also outside of this research. I made notes of time spent on the land and doing the work of food. The notes and sketches I refer to serve as a journal of sorts, though they seemed much less formal than the journaling I used in my master's research. I made notes before and after interviews, often in snippets, often with more questions. I also began to write about my own personal healing journey that I present in the discussion, as a narrative that mimicked the stories of the Elders.

Data Synthesis and Methodological Metaphors

As the interviews began to build off one another, I sketched out and painted a single image using water colours to coincide with what seemed to be representative of the key idea that the practice of feeding is a necessary endeavor towards healing. I painted a tree to represent

ceremony; specifically, the give and take of the sundance ceremony; blueberries to represent the teaching of language; and, a night sky to represent the concept of ancestors. I considered these drawings as touch points for moving forward. Every Elder spoke of ceremony, language and the ancestors.

The use of symbols and metaphors, as suggested by Absolson (2011) and Lavallée (2007), guided the process of making meaning of the stories and experiences collected through interviews and personal observations. I was greatly influenced by the idea that as the listener of the stories, my role was to continue to keep the stories alive; to share them out (Sarris [Federated Coast Miwok], 1993). Metaphor has a strong place in Indigenous research and proved to be a critical tool for making meaning of what the Elders shared with me. This is because the Elders also spoke in metaphor in their interviews.

The use of symbol and metaphor was previously established in my Master's thesis (Martens, 2015) and subsequent publications (Robin, 2019; Martens et al., 2016). Stories, myths and metaphors are central tenets of Indigenous research methodologies (Lowan-Trudeau [Métis], 2019) and have been used to describe researcher preparation and design (Absolon, 2011; Lambert, 2014), data collection (Jackson et al., 2015), and making meaning (Absolon, 2011; Cole [Stl'atl'imx], 2002). Metaphors are a critical part of Indigenous knowledge systems, providing the artistic, relational, and mythical elements of Indigenous learning, and thus, Indigenous ways of being (Cajete [Tewa], 1994; Cole, 2002).

The number of Elder participants was determined based on the emergence of a metaphor through the research. The metaphor of feeding was revealed around the seventh interview. Once the metaphor had been revealed, three more Elders were interviewed to confirm that the metaphor was appropriate and representative of the stories shared. I worked with the stories

carefully and attempted to keep longer quotes together as much as possible. This is because Indigenous knowledge is contextual and to remove the before or after in an Elder's story may change the story from how it was meant to be shared.

In an Indigenous context, data analysis can be a problematic approach to making meaning by eliminating relationality. Wilson (2008) describes:

So an Indigenous style of analysis has to look at all those relations as a whole instead of breaking it down, cause it just won't work. So it has to use more of an intuitive logic, rather than a linear logic, because you can't just break everything down into small parts and use linear logic to bring them back together as a whole. (p. 119)

The concept of narrative synthesis was introduced to me as a way to engage with relationships in the stories. Narrative synthesis proposes the adoption of a narrative summary of the findings (Petticrew et al., 2009). Popay et al. (2006) explain the process of narrative synthesis as including four main elements: "developing a theory of how the intervention works, why and for whom; developing a primary synthesis of findings of included studies; exploring relationships in the data; and, assessing the robustness of the synthesis" (p. 11). It is important to note that the literature on narrative synthesis in an Indigenous context is lacking. Thus, while I acknowledge the work of Popay et al. (2006), I focused only on the third and fourth points. Indeed, in exploring relationships within the data, I am reminded of Wilson's (2008) statement, "And if we are saying that an Indigenous methodology includes all of these relationships, if you are breaking things down into their smallest pieces, you are destroying all of those relationships around it" (p. 119). In holistic narrative synthesis, the focus is on how language is used as part of a whole story. The story is not broken into pieces, rather emphasis is on understanding key themes in the stories (data) along with the transitions between those themes. Importantly, it is advised to also

pay attention to what was not said (Gibbs, 2015). Regarding Popay et al.'s (2006) fourth point on determining the robustness of the synthesis, this research along with the narrative synthesis and proposed themes was presented back to the Elders for their review and feedback. I considered the data to be validated “through the “collective voice” of participants and researchers” as described by Morelli and Mataira (2010, p. 10). Thus, the Elders were presented with the metaphor and results chapter in order to review and correct my understandings of what had been shared. This was of particular importance given that parts of the interview were shared in Cree, and I required support to ensure my understanding of these terms and ideas was correct. That feedback is presented in my results section.

Working with metaphor can present challenges. Often what is lacking from research with metaphor are the processes of working with the metaphor. I will do my best to explain it here. The first step for me was to sketch out and paint the three most common concepts and teachings shared by the Elders. For me, the pictorial representations allowed me to further engage with metaphor, given that I had assigned a single symbol to represent an idea. Those symbols represented the concept of feeding, an act towards and conducive with healing. The metaphor of feeding came to me through the Elders own use of metaphor, namely in speaking of feeding and hunger. Indeed, in reading the words of the Elders, one can see how often the Elders spoke in metaphor. I was able to articulate three areas of feeding the Elders referred to: feeding oneself, feeding our ancestors, and feeding community. With these in mind, I returned to the transcripts and came up with a list of key concepts and ideas. For example, the Elders spoke about the importance of language that I considered an example of “feeding oneself”. From there, I wrote the results section trying to maintain a story-like flow.

The stories that emerge through this research and the potential of this study of Indigenous knowledge offer an opportunity to re-frame Indigenous food studies and Indigenous social work from an Indigenous lens, an emerging field in both disciplines. This project is an example of how Indigenous knowledges and methods of inquiry can support Indigenist research (Hart, 2009) while providing examples of decolonial and anti-colonial approaches to healing Indigenous bodies, food systems, and lands. Research design should work in harmony with the research topic. Moreover, through Indigenous ways of knowing, we come closer to telling our own stories, in our own ways. The next chapter presents the metaphor of feeding and the powerful food stories that the Elders shared. These are the stories that fed me.

Chapter 4: The Elder's Food Stories

For Indigenous peoples in Canada, the literal act of feeding or being fed has a long and dark history of government intervention (Robin et al., 2020). With an emphasis on food security, government and health interventions offer food as a source of sustenance, but also barbed benevolence. These practices have failed to effectively end hunger in Indigenous communities. Moreover, they fail to consider food as part of holistic well-being. Hunger is often presented as something that can be sated when fed, but hunger does not only refer to food. We can hunger for our sense of place in the world, we can hunger for change, and we can hunger to know who we are. To be hungry means to be lacking more than just food and nutrients, but also encompasses a lack of the relationships that serve to ground us in our own Indigeneity. This includes connection to land and spirit. The antidote to hunger is being fed. Not only physically, but spiritually, mentally, and emotionally. In order to remove ourselves from the oppressive colonized food system we are faced with, we must resist, and we must re-build so that we can feed ourselves as our ancestors once did.

I present the stories of the Elders in this section through the metaphor of feeding in three areas of daily life: feeding ourselves, feeding the ancestors, and feeding community. I chose feeding deliberately. The Elders spoke of food throughout their interviews as a verb and a noun. Feeding is an action. It is a way to care for oneself, for the land and ancestors, and those around us. The use of metaphor was an obvious fit for this research. Hunger, starvation, and feeding are not just physical, but metaphorical experiences as described above, and throughout the Elders' stories presented below. Moreover, metaphor speaks to the felt theory that guides this research: food is emotional, and has been used as a weapon and a healer. We have been affected by food in many negative ways. But we can also be affected by food in ways that lead to being well.

There is considerable overlap and interconnections amongst feeding ourselves, feeding our ancestors, and feeding our communities. If we follow the advice of the Elders and eat according to our original instructions and teachings of the land, we will feed our ancestors and our communities. At the same time, learning to feed ourselves through food and spirit can necessitate a stronger relationship with ancestors. From there, and indeed through Cree ways of being, we are able to extend outwards to help, support and feed those around us. On a larger scale, we begin to re-build a community, a nation that feeds itself, as we once did without government intervention. Feeding ourselves is anti-oppressive work. It requires stepping out of the colonial influences that have brought starvation to our communities. Each element presented here speaks to the power of feeding or being fed. Feeding is a necessary part of healing. Moreover, feeding is an opportunity to heal and support holistic well-being.

In preparing this section, I had Morrison's (2011) definition of an Indigenous food system in mind: "Consisting of a multitude of natural communities, Indigenous food systems include all land, soil, water, air, plants and animals, as well as Indigenous knowledge, wisdom and values" (p. 98). Coulthard (2010) explains that Indigenous understandings of the concept of land also contain people. By adding people to this definition, we reach a more interconnected and holistic definition of community.

Feeding Ourselves

The Elders spoke of how, in order to move forward, we must first know where we have been (Makokis et al., 2020). To begin understanding how and why we feed ourselves, both spiritually and physically, we must start with a basic understanding of Cree food systems. Food is described as foundational in Cree culture:

Food is an essential piece. It's essential. I would say it's connecting; it is connecting, it is *the* connector. It is the lightning rod if you will, between us and the healing

processes, the healing properties, the healing end goal we are seeking. If we want wellness, we're going to have to include food in it. (Ed)

The Elders offered stories of the food systems of their youth, sharing how growing up, their food came from the land. All Elders described how spending time on the land as a family was the norm. Everyone had work to do; cooperation and participation are necessary to obtaining food from the land: "I grew up at the trapline. Every spring and fall we would all go there and we just ate traditional food so it was always about prepping food" (Teresa).

Through processes of colonization obtaining food from the land became increasingly difficult. The Elders spoke at length of these changes and their implications for Cree peoples. Jeff pointed to how current dis-ease can be traced to early processes of clearing the lands for settlers:

So, we had to almost eat the foods out of the store. And this is where diseases began to set in. High cholesterol, heart diseases and you name it, it started entering the community. Obesity. And where we discovered obesity came from is a lot of the communities, the First Nations they were forced to sign treaty and were literally starved. So, when you starve, you just pile in the food into your mouth; it's like the last time you are going to eat. That's why we see that obesity today. Because somebody down your bloodline experienced hunger over here.

Jeff's quote speaks to how the experience of hunger does not occur only in the physical sense. There is spirit and emotion in food. Hunger carries through generations and speaks to an absence of food *and* spirit. People are tied to the land through spirit; one of these ties is food from the land. Thus, Cree food systems, as Ed shared, are spiritual:

Like I said, that's where the spirit lives. More so, that's where the spirit is at its strongest.... You can feel it in the rain drops hitting your head, hitting your face. You can feel it in the wind brushing through your hair. You can connect to it from the sun's rays. The beauty of the night sky. I mean, there's spirit, there's life, you can see it.

And yet, the place where the spirit is strongest has been subjected to resource extraction and development, at great cost to Cree peoples who have experienced land dispossession, forced relocation, and flooding. The Elders shared how most illnesses experienced by Cree people are connected to colonization of the mind, body, and spirit through the displacement and destruction of lands, families, and cultural foundations such as language and ceremony.

Victor shared the changes his own family experienced and how intertwined these aspects of life are:

When I was a child, we pretty much lived completely off the land. My grandfather was a self-sufficient person and he provided for his family and his extended family.... he had his family, his brothers, his wife, his children, his brother's children, their wives, their family. He provided for everybody. And he made a living off the land. And so that's how we lived, we lived from the food off the land. And when Hydro development started occurring in the 50s and the 60s and the dams were put up on the Saskatchewan River, in Saskatchewan and in Manitoba, at Grand Rapids and that flooded out all the people that survived on the land. Right from Saskatchewan to Grand Rapids, people all along that river system were flooded out and they couldn't provide anymore. So, my grandparents moved everybody into the town of The Pas and we lived on the outskirts of the town of The Pas in a Métis

settlement called Umpherville. And he tried to fish and it was really hard fishing and my dad went to work with the CNR. And he got into alcohol. And shortly after that my mother got into alcohol and pretty much, we got taken away or given away to other people. So, I have 8 siblings and I never grew up with one of them. And two of them I knew about and the other 6 I didn't know they were there at all. Until one of them had come looking at my door when she was 40 years old. And so, this is one of the changes that happened in regard to living off that land.

Nathan echoed how changes to traditional food systems has meant market-based foods are the norm for Cree communities:

Today much of the hunting, fishing, and gathering areas are no longer as productive as long ago. Settlers have made sure of that. Lands are fenced off; rivers are being dammed up and food harvesting areas have become very difficult. It's a lot easier to go to store to buy food instead of trying to go find traditional food off the land.

Similar experiences were had by other Elders who shared stories of loss of homelands and family structures; thus, contributing to a cycle of dependency:

Yes, and even just looking, our history as Aboriginal people and the residential school system and the 60's scoop. All of those influences on our abilities to be able to think for us, and be able to, because of the controlled systems we've lived for so many generations, we have to work at having that independence and the confidence and the good self-esteem for being able to do these things for ourselves. Because you know it took years and years and years of eating away and picking at the spirit of our people. And so that's one of the major things we have to work at, is regaining

our independence, our knowing that we can do these things for ourselves and working at it. (Lily)

The colonial changes to Indigenous lands, families, and cultures are deeply problematic to Cree understandings of well-being. Too often, food is presented as physical sustenance, a source of nutrition or in the case of food insecurity, a means of not going hungry. This ignores the powerful spiritual and emotional dimensions of food for Cree peoples. Food is not only sustenance or a group of nutrients, but rather a physical and spiritual connection to self, the land, ancestors, and communities, as Andrew explained:

When we eat food, there's a physical aspect of how it nurtures the body, but there's also the spiritual aspect of how that food nurtures your spirit. So, there's a physical and then there's a spiritual reflection of that physical, you know. And so, same thing with the sun and with the trees, we understand everything has spirit, right?

All of the Elders spoke of food as a spiritual act and all Elders referred to traditional or natural foods as being critical for feeding oneself. Food is holistic medicine, though the spiritual dimension of food is not well understood in a biomedical model as Jeff described:

In order to be healthy, they [doctors] say, the foremost mind. Educate the mind. And once that mind is educated the body becomes healthy. You know, sometimes they don't even imply the spiritual well-being of an individual.

Nathan explained Cree understandings of well-being must contain food: "Having a healthy body, mind and spirit requires a proper diet. Eating healthy also means your physical, emotional, mental and spiritual are in balance."

Looking at how foods are located within ceremony provides a more holistic understanding of what it means to be well. Food is used in a multitude of Cree ceremonies, as

stated by the Elders: feasting, fasting, sweat lodge, full moon ceremonies, night lodge, smoke lodge, sun dance or thirst dance, rites of passage such as walking out ceremonies and berry fasts, naming ceremonies, moon time ceremonies, strawberry moon ceremonies, bear lodge, and pow wows all incorporate food. Moreover, these ceremonies invoke the spirit, a common thread between food and ceremony: they are both spiritual processes. Ceremony occurs on the land and in the waters through hunting, fishing, gathering, picking, growing, and trapping, but requires a spiritual presence that recognizes and honours the gifts of food, as Nora described:

And you know when you really think about the types of foods that we ate to the simple idea of picking a berry. And how you're already going into a ceremony when you're on the land and picking berries. You're offering that tobacco, you're praying, because anything we take from the land, we have to give something back.

The act of feeding oneself is powerful, in part, due to the connections that food brings to the table. Spiritual nourishment is critical to Cree well-being. This sentiment was echoed by Eric, who shared the process of eating as spiritual:

Every time we sit together, having a meal together, we are, we are connected.... We acknowledge the food that was prepared and also the people that prepared the food. And we acknowledge that we wouldn't be alive without the animals that have given up their lives for that food, so we can eat it. And so, we acknowledge that part, eh? So that puts us in communication, in communion with the spiritual laws that remind us that we are connected to the animal world and the plant world. We're connected to the water and all those things are made, are part of food.

The Elders explained how many of the spiritual connections of food are not fully understood due to the loss of language and traditional teachings surrounding relationships to the land and waters. To move forward, once again, we have to look back:

Because prior to us coming to this world, our Creation story, that the animals were here first preparing the vegetation, the berries, and so forth, eh? They all had their work cut out. That's why these animals play a strong part in that role of healing. They're just not a buffalo; they're just not a bear. Those kind of terms are foreign to us. But when we say them in the language they become so connected to an individual and they're able to understand. (Jeff)

Understanding Cree language beyond the translation to English is part of healing. Indeed, embedded within the language are instructions for how to eat. Andrew described:

The language coming from the land, the spirit of the land, the spirit of the water, the spirit of the sky, and therefore that grew with our understanding of our spiritual relationship with those physical, natural relatives. And so, when you start to understand the original stories of them and the evolution of the language then you start to understand what you're feeding yourself with more.

This is particularly true when it comes to berries. Berries were mentioned by all Elders as a foundational ceremonial food, from feasting to berry fasts. Many of the Elders spoke to the health benefits of eating berries. Dawn shared how she learned that berries were necessary for health from her father:

That's what he always said, like we have a lot of blueberries around here and I wasn't one that was fussy about the blueberries, I rather like the raspberries. You

know, he said, you eat those you'll live a long time. But what he meant by that when you stop and think about it is, you're eating good food.

In learning about the berries, I was presented with their Cree names, broken down to explain their connection to being well. Jeff explained how critical this understanding is: "Berries were always a part of our natural substance in maintaining a healthy balance within our First Nation people, however, how they are translated is what is in question." Take, for example,

ininimina, those are blueberries. But what it really means is *inninew minum*, what it translates to is the health of our people lies in those berries. *Inninew* is a human being, *minomiyamum* is health, the good life. *Ininimina* is those two words together to make the word blueberry. Now knowing that *ininimina* that it translates to the concept that the health lies within these berries, our life, our well-being lies within these berries. It's significant. Contrast that with blueberry. What does the word blueberry tell you? It doesn't tell you anything. (Ed)

The blueberry is more than a source of physical health, however:

This is the very first berry we lead off with ceremony. Because it is like that purple darkness in the sky when you look up into the star world. It's almost that colour, that berry is that colour. So, this was the very first berry. And it talks about that spiritual well-being. In doing ceremonies, in any ceremonies that the Cree people do this is the foremost berry that was given by our Creator to be able to connect spiritually. In a spiritual sense. So, when we do pipe ceremonies, sweat lodges, the big lodges and so forth, this is the foremost berry that they bring in there. (Jeff)

Similarly, Jeff explained the strawberry:

So, when we talk about the strawberry, we call it *mitemina*. *Mitemina*. The very first implication to that prescribed language, what it's telling us, is to have a healthy heart. So, you don't have any, you know, you don't have any blood clots. And it's not these strawberries that you buy at the store that they inject and grow like apples, it's the tiny ones that come from the Earth, eh. Then we go on, all these, all these berries have a purpose to them.

The Elders spoke of how their work in helping and healing capacities includes the berries. Food is used in ceremony and also as medicine:

But it's also used as medicines. Like one of the things that, sometimes when people come and ask for direction or ask the grandmothers and grandfathers for healing in the sweat lodge or in the pipe ceremony, I see, I do the ceremony. I get visions, I get visions of things, like I get, of blueberries, of fish oil, of fish, and these are the things that, along with that cloth and the medicines and the tobacco, and these are what people have to do. They have to ingest either that food, those foods, and also offer it out. And so, this includes them in their healing process. (Victor)

The Elders shared that for healing to take place, one must be willing to undertake the physical, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual work of being well. As Victor stated above, "this includes *them* in their healing process" (emphasis added). Many of the Elders shared how their own healing journeys resulted in taking on the work of being a helper, becoming part of a cycle of helping:

Initially it was all about healing first, you know, going through all of that. And once you're comfortable, I found myself sticking around with the sweat lodge ceremony,

with the Elders I was working with. And as time went by, I was able to help other people also. (Nathan)

It is important to articulate that healing, learning, attending ceremonies, and re-connecting to one's food system is work. It takes effort and commitment. The work, however, must first start with the self:

We have to understand, we have to believe and we have to be in comfort with the fact that we are, we can determine our paths as long as we try to follow a good road. And we try to do the best, we try to do things that make us feel good and, in that sense, we can help others. We have to feel good for ourselves before we can go helping anybody else. (Victor)

Nathan shared the importance of doing the internal work to be well:

The more we put into life, whatever we're doing, the more we put into it, the more we're going to see that we're going to get out of it. I have this whole thing about this. And I know Indigenous people have suffered a great deal, right and you know, being an educator and still an educator today, the work that I do, but I keep referring to the whole thing about yes, I recognize all the hurts and wrongs that Indigenous people have been gone in, endured over the years, since time, since settlers came here, to North America or whatever. But how are you going to get by on all of that if we continue to harbour the same things over again and again? I know it's a fact of life. I understand all of that. But how can I help myself if I continue to carry all those things with me, you know? So, you really have to work hard at that. And to try to find a way, a good solution to how am I going to work on that? How am I going to get past that?

Working with Elders in a helping and healing capacity requires a spiritual, physical, emotional and intellectual commitment. Lily shared how self is one of the most important components of healing:

The medicine is not going to work if you just go through the motions. Or if you come and seek help and you get the medicines and you're told to do this and you're told to do that and you go home and you just leave it. The medicine doesn't work in the cupboard or left in the fridge. You have to drink it. You have to follow the instructions. You have to have the want and the need and the desire to be well again. And so, it's very, very important. Nobody can do it for you. You have to be able to do that for yourself and you have to put work into that.

The Elders also recognized that healing is not easy. There are significant barriers to being well, including the ability to make choices to support your well-being: "And I think it's something that to be self-determining, to be in charge of an important aspect of your life, like food, you have to have options or you have to have education or options that you can expand your- how you eat your food or how you spend your money" (Eric). Similarly, Lily offered:

For other people who have limited income and live in the city it almost seems like a daunting task. Like, where are they going to get their traditional food? But even with that, to try to steer them into home cooking, more fruits and vegetables and again they're living on welfare. And so, there can be many obstacles that can, that can prevent people from attaining that healthy diet.... And the bottom line is it's about money, yeah. And a lot of our people don't have the resources to be able to access good food. But the thing is, if we live out in the country, we have to get back to land-

based ways of life where we're able to grow our own food and teach our children to grow food and to be canning.

The path forward, the way to begin the work of healing both people and our food systems, starts with the self. Feeding ourselves means undertaking the commitment of re-learning the practices of our ancestors, in ceremony and on the land. It requires re-learning our ancestral languages so that we may better understand and actualize the value of food in Cree culture. Revealed within our ceremonies, languages, and the Elders' teachings provide valuable instructions for how to live in harmony with each other and the land. We must learn our roles and responsibilities within our Cree food system. The Elders acknowledge that learning to feed yourself is not easy. But there are supports, as the next section reveals.

Feeding Our Ancestors

The delineation between feeding ourselves and feeding our ancestors is slight. These concepts are similar in nature and spirit. Feeding our ancestors is an intentional act undertaken to address harmony, balance, and reciprocity. It provides a critical connection to our spirit helpers. To work towards healing, we must include the ancestors. To understand our roles and responsibilities as Cree peoples, we must include the ancestors. In part because they are there for you; but also, because we are responsible for the past, present and future generations, as Victor described:

Well, we're told that we have our responsibility. This is part of the, one of the interpretations of the seven generations. We're told we hold sway over seven generations. There are three ahead of us, and three behind us. Of course, the three behind us are our parents, our grandparents, and our great grandparents. And the three in front of us are our children, our grandchildren, and our great grandchildren.

These are the seven and we are sitting right in the center of that. So, these are the seven generations we hold sway over. And these are the ones that we feed. And they take that spirit for those that are behind us. When we feed our great grandparents, they take that spirit into the past and they let our great-ancestors know that we are carrying on the message that was given to us.

To learn to feed yourself fully, you must learn to feed the ancestors. This speaks to the Elders' earlier statements on the work beginning with yourself. I have chosen to present feeding our ancestors as a separate finding because of the unique and specific relationships that Cree peoples have with Creation:

Whether- I also use food when I'm, like a feast, when we acknowledge Creator, when we acknowledge Creation and, like right now when all the new life is coming and we're beginning to harvest and we go and we put out food for Creation and asking for good growth throughout the season, that we'll be able to be out there harvesting, that the spirit of the medicines will be strong. (Lily)

The Elders also described ways to use food to seek help. In speaking with the Elders, pain, trauma, loss, and grief came up repeatedly. They were clear that learning to seek help, and to have faith in the process of healing involves the ancestors.

In learning to seek connection and ask for help, we must start with tobacco, as Nora explained:

So anything that I do, I always, first and foremost I have my tobacco, I use tobacco and I use my prayer cloth and I send out prayers and ask for guidance and direction that the work that I am expected to do, I know that it comes from the Creator. Like, I am only a vessel. I am a helper, I am a messenger, and I always keep that in mind.

Offerings to the land, to ancestors and all of Creation are expressed as gratitude: “And I think it goes back to recognizing and honouring that which gives you life, that you don’t take it for granted and you’re grateful for it, you put down tobacco, you put down some berries maybe, just in thanks, giving that which we are given to survive” (Lily). The Elders were clear about their role in healing: they are only a piece of one’s healing journey. Those seeking healing must also cultivate relationships with the land, ancestors, helpers, spirit guides, and self. Feeding the ancestors is a lesson in reciprocity; to receive help, guidance, and support, you must first offer to the ancestors and indeed to Creation. Reciprocity reflects the cycles of life that are found in Creation. Indeed, the Cree words for food, eating and defecating provide insight into how food has always been seen as a cycle:

The food that we eat gives its life so that we can take that life in and we can take that spirit in and discard the waste. In our language we say eating as *meechi*, is to eat. *Meechim* is food. And then to defecate is to *meechita*. So, there’s a very close association with eating and defecating. Same word: *meechi* and *meechita*. The *meechi* is to take the food in, and your body becomes like a filter where your body grabs the spirit and the life from that food and the waste passes through and returns to earth. (Ed)

The Elders described how the Cree language contains instructions for how and what to eat. *Meechim*, *meechi*, and *meechita* describe food that comes from and returns to the land. Historically, diets were entirely land-based; changes to the land and government restrictions including policies, laws, regulations, and a rapidly changing economy, resulted in a need for market-based food. However, the Elders were clear in stating that

we must feed the ancestors food that they recognize: food from Cree territories. Ed described one of the biggest changes to ceremonial food that he has experienced in his lifetime:

Here is the most significant way I've seen it. It's in the types of food that are being brought to ceremony. And we have been chastised by the spirit world for bringing exotic foods to our feasts. They're saying what is the stuff you're feeding us, we don't recognize it, what the hell is this stuff? Well, they don't say what the hell is this stuff [laughing], but when you think about a traditional feast we're talking about moose, we're talking fish you know, pickerel, jackfish, you know. Fish that's familiar to us.... And from nation to nation, from Indigenous nation to Indigenous nation those foods will differ. Like squash is not something that I'm used to, right? The beans and so on and so forth. I'm not used to those. So, they really, you have to be aware of the foods that were traditionally consumed in the area that you reside in at the moment.

This point was further clarified and reinforced by Nora, who shared:

Those, try to bring those foods that our Elders, our grandmothers, our grandfathers, the spirit world, what they're familiar with so we know that when we go to our ceremonies, I am going to bring a pot of moose nose soup. I know that. I know that I am going to bring moose meat. I know that I am going to bring tea. I know that I am going to bring lard. And you know, when you, when you sit back and you reflect about why we do those things that we do, it's all in our history, it's all in our lineage, it's all in our family, right? And I can't amplify enough how important our old foods are. That in itself is a ceremony.

Fish, moose, berries, fat, and corn were mentioned by all of the Elders as foods that are present in Cree ceremonies. They referred to traditional foods such as moose, berries, muskrat, beaver, ducks and geese, as staples in the diets of their childhood. As described earlier, these are foods the Elders encourage eating to be well. Moreover, these are the foods we must bring to ceremony so that we feed our ancestors well. The Elders discussed a number of ceremonies in detail, most commonly the sweat lodge, the feast, and grieving ceremonies such as memorial feasts, which I present below. Understanding why it is important to feed the ancestors is key to discussing food in ceremony.

The Elders described the ways that feeding our ancestors works within a healing framework, as honouring and recognizing those that have come before us:

That's the first thing we are told is that we have to include those that have come before us, our *pawakunahk*, our *dodemuk*, our relatives, our guiding helpers, our spirits. And we have to include them in what we do because if it wasn't for them, then we wouldn't be where we are and doing what we're doing. (Victor)

Similarly, Lily explained:

Yes, food is very important and also when we recognize our spirit helpers, when we recognize our names, our clans, and we honour them with tobacco, we also honour them with food. And same with when we do our water ceremony. When we recognize and honour our ancestors, we also put food out for them. And when we have our funerals, our spiritual funerals, when we put our, when our relatives go on their spirit journey, we always, always, use food at that time too.

The connections between *matootsan* (sweat lodge) and food are strong. Indeed, food is a conduit to the ancestors. At the same time, we can be fed through the *matootsan*. For example,

That's our grandmother and grandfather, our ancestors in the sweat lodge. So, when we pour water on them, they give up their energy and we get detoxified. They take away our burdens. And also like, it makes sense because when you think of the rock it's full of minerals. And I think when you eat the right foods, it aligns like your gut, the minerals you need for your brain.... So, when we have our sweat lodge, we make a spirit dish and the whole purpose for having a spirit dish is because when you have a sweat, you are asking your ancestors to come and sit with you in the sweat, right? And you give them, you provide them with food to make them happy and then you can ask them for their help. (Teresa)

Food is an integral part of the *matootsan*, because it brings people and ancestors together in spirit and through the spirit in food:

I usually bring feast food to the sweat: bannock, lard, corn, fish, berries (home canned) and tea. A sample is taken from each of the foods, tobacco is added to it, and we bring that into the sweat lodge in the fourth round. Once the round is over, the food is prayed upon to the spirit helpers that were asked to come help us out in the ceremony. We also offer the food to our loved ones that have gone on to the spirit world. When I come to sweat, I offer food to the birds and animals that are around the sweat grounds. Once they see you put food out, they will come. It is said that the ones in spirit world will look kindly at your offerings and will look favorably at your prayer request. Once we finish the sweat, we all share in the remaining food.

The spirit dish is either taken out in the bush in a clean area or left on the sweat rocks. Any remaining food left over will also be taken into the bush. This how food is basically introduced in all our Cree ceremonies. It is not only food for us to eat but more importantly to feed those ones who have come to help us out. (Nathan)

Feasts were also discussed by the Elders as a celebration, an offering, and a space for being together. While feasts are part of the *matootsan*, they are also held for other ceremonies and as a ceremony itself: “Feasting, as my father would say, who is my teacher, is the highest ceremony that we do. Because it is so central to our wellness, our health and our well-being” (Ed). Andrew shared how eating together feeds body and spirit: “You know, you share that spiritual food with them, you know and we, the spirit of that food nurtures both of us and we eat together and have a relationship that solidifies or strengthens our relationship with each other some more, and maintains it, you know.”

Nathan offered further insight into feasting:

When community feasts are done, prayers are spoken with the food on behalf of the community. It is important to have community feasts because it brings the families together, the children, moms, dads, grandparents and Elders. It not only takes a parent or family member to raise a child; it takes the whole community. When the children see how the community comes together, they will feel the love and support, not only from their own family but from the community as a whole.

Feasts are also a significant part of grieving ceremonies and processes. Indeed, food plays a central role in grieving, allowing for and supporting connections with the ancestors and those that have passed on before us, but we must feed them so that they recognize us:

We also, we also want to connect with our ancestors. For us, as Cree people, we regard our ancestors who have moved on to the spirit world or who have made the change from this world to the spirit world as servants of our maker. We don't believe in a hell. What I have taken to saying is hell, hell came over in the boats. The whole concept of hell. We never had that. We understand that the Creator made four heavens for us and that's where we go when we die, we go to heaven. And every human being who lives, who has lived, had a favourite food, something that they just love to eat. When you want to connect with someone in the spirit world, that's one thing we've done is we've taken to offering just a snippet of their favourite food to engage their attention. (Ed)

This carries particular resonance for dealing with loss and grief. Eric described the work he does to support those who are grieving:

In my work, like, what I've done also is grieving ceremonies. I've had pipe ceremonies. Say someone has died, passed away, sometime ago and they're stuck in their grieving. Maybe not stuck. But some people are stuck in their grieving and some people are, haven't had a way to process their grief in a spiritual way. So, we use, if they are willing, I ask them to bring a dish, an item of what the passed, the deceased person liked to eat.

This is similar to the chi bi¹² ceremony, shared by Eric below:

In one of the sessions, we invite an Elder to come and lead a feast, a feast for the loved ones that have passed away. And it's called a chi bi ceremony. Chi bi means ghost. And people are instructed to bring food. Again, it's the food the person used

¹² The Chi bi ceremony is an Anishinaabe ceremony. Given that the Elders' work has no borders, it is not surprising to see this ceremony mentioned by a Cree Elder.

to like to eat, the departed one, used to like to eat here. And you would bring your food and the Elder does the ceremony, the pipe ceremony, and he speaks for those that are there and also all of the foods that have been prepared for that feast, he speaks for that. He talks about that afterlife, that people have died, people have died and he speaks, when doing the pipe ceremony, he creates a space where this food can be offered to the spirits that have passed on. And the spirits can come there, to that room, to come and join the people there that are there in mourning. And so that's another ceremony that's quite powerful.

For one Elder who recently lost a son, grieving through food was deeply personal:

At my home, at my home we give out, we put out feast food for my son. So that really helps a lot. That's, I think, what's helped out the most. I remember the first time I did it, at home, in September, I was having a hard time. And then I was like, I think I am going to make my son's favourite food. So, I made ribs and potatoes, mashed potatoes and I didn't even tell my kids what I was doing, it was on my own, in my mind and so I was food prepping, even doing that was like healing. So, I had my food and I put a little bit of food out and we were eating supper and I took out my sage and I smudged my little spirit dish. And then my son was like, what are you doing? And I said I'm going to go put food out.... And then all of the sudden he was getting really excited and like, I'm coming with you and he's putting on his jacket and his food. So, we went outside, we stood by the tree because we have a cedar tree in the backyard. We're standing there and we offer tobacco and we talked to him and we cried and I'm just processing these emotions and when we got back inside,

I noticed that, I mean, I felt better after doing that, and I noticed that my son, my baby son was happier. (Teresa)

I would be remiss to not include the note that this Elder sent to me after this interview; Teresa shared how talking about and describing these processes helped with her own healing journey. I leave that note here to signal hope and as a reminder that the work of healing is a lifelong endeavour. It is still work, however. It still requires learning and re-learning and a commitment to the work. Re-learning to feed the ancestors means re-learning the right foods to feed the ancestors, which necessitates our own “good” food choices. Feeding oneself is implicated here, and feeding the ancestors follows after feeding oneself for that reason: once we understand our roles and responsibilities and our ancestors’ roles in our well-being and in our Cree-ness, we practice responsibility and reciprocity, key values of Cree food systems. The Elders told me that the ancestors are there to help take care of you, but you also must take care of them. Feeding our ancestors creates a mechanism of support to take on the work of healing. And importantly, it reminds us where we have come from: the lands, the bodies, and the spirit. Seen in this context, food takes on the role of healer *and* helper.

Feeding Our Communities

To be part of community means to be part of the relationships and connections between all things. In this way, feeding community is an enormous undertaking, but it is critical to extend these definitions outwards to a community level. The concept of feeding community thus takes on a new responsibility: to one another, to families and clans and kinship systems, to the land, and to our ancestors. I present this section by offering community as relation and by considering all that Cree peoples are in relationship with. Feeding community means to feed each other, but not just literally. It also means to work

towards re-igniting the teachings of our ancestors so that we may live in harmony with Creation.

All Elders shared how relationships have been altered through colonialism. Many spoke of how this was a deliberate attempt to erase and remove Indigenous peoples from the land and their culture, altering families and community. The Elders spoke of how much daily life had changed from their youth to now. They recognized all of the elements that have altered that way of life, including government agencies and interferences. When discussing feeding community, we must begin with understanding these interferences to provide context and insight into an erosion of community. For example, when understood as the source of well-being, the banning of spiritual, ceremonial, and medicinal practices changed life dramatically:

And then they [Indian Agents] started restricting our movements and not being on the trapline as much, people couldn't go and live on there, different camps, like seasonal camps, because they wanted everybody to stay on the reserve and send the kids to school. And so, they couldn't follow that lifestyle anymore and when that happened, they started to lose their freedom of movement and in it the will and the ability to live off the land because now they're stuck on the reserve and started to rely on Hudson Bay, canned and processed foods, and how it impacts not only that ability to be able to support yourself but also to live off the land. Kids were being taken away to residential school, that whole impact not only affected the spirit, the emotional well-being of the community, but the physical health as well. The movement, the exercises, when they were going out trapping, living off the land. So now they have a more sedentary lifestyle. (Lily)

The forced and enforced boundaries of the reserve systems are a significant change that limited freedom to live with the land and family. These changes exacerbated and introduced diseases such as diabetes by changing Cree peoples' relationship with the land and the concept of feeding. Other interferences were shared by Jeff who discussed the vital role of underground or hidden teachers:

And we've gone away from those medicines because now we've been partially assimilated and it was by law that we could no longer harvest and pick medicines. And I remember my grandfather said, he remembered being in a sermon in the United Church that he was told by the minister, the UC minister, saying before I tell you, before I speak of this sermon today, I received a letter by her Queen Majesty accompanied by the Lieutenant Governor and this was in August 1935, you people of Cross Lake will no longer be allowed to harvest or pick any herbal medicines. If you are caught picking medicines, you will be dealt with in the most extreme. So that tells you a lot what happened, eh. And what we're trying to attempt to get back. A lot of the ceremonies, a lot of the harvesting actually went underground. And I'm very grateful for my ancestors for taking this underground, keeping it a secret. And now it's time for us to no longer fear that process, eh? And you hear these sad situations such as that. But evolving through time we have survived with our languages, a way of life and continue to maintain the food sovereignty with what little lands we have left, eh?

That Cree and Indigenous peoples have survived and are still here working to reclaim traditional food practices speaks to the strength of the relationships that exist between people, culture and the land. There is a need to center traditional teachings in reclaiming

these practices. All of the Elders spoke to this need, especially in understanding how and why we take from the land. The Cree language sheds light into these processes. Jeff described how the land and language are indelibly linked:

But what that particular language tells us, *pimatisiwin* what we are following, so Mother Earth as it uncovers and as it grows. We're following it, eh. And that was the harvesting part of it. In connection with the constellations and there are many constellations that we know at a certain given time that those strawberries are only here for a period of two, two and a half weeks to three weeks and they're done. And if you missed the boat, then you're not following the land. Then you tend to want to eat something else. So, it was a meticulous process for us to stay connected to that ceremony. That's why they have berry ceremonies and what not. So hence the word, the Creator's law that we follow as to the connection to the homelands. So, that's what *pimatisiwin* means, it's not just a simple word that means life. Well, what is life? It's such a vague term. And it's about choices. Ours was not a choice, it was set in motion already. We needed to go harvest this particular berry, we needed to harvest this particular berry and so forth. That's how we need to understand the connection of food sovereignty and being spiritually healthy, eh.

As Jeff shared, the land and language are teachers. The Elders spoke to the need for these teachers and how traditional teachings around food, land, and ceremony are healing. They also spoke to the responsibilities that Cree peoples have in relation to the land. Many of the Elders shared how they were not seeing these teachings in action. They discussed the need for understanding the values of respect and responsibility. For example,

I find that a lot of our young people because they haven't learnt the traditional ways- like I said, dad only killed one moose to get us through the winter months, okay? These guys are going out there, oh, I'm a treaty Indian, I can kill as many as I want. They have no respect. Like, you kill 3 or 4 moose, there's not going to be any left for your grandchildren or your great-grandchildren. You know, they're going to slowly die off. And that's where I see a big difference. And they're not, when we killed an animal, every bit of that animal was used for something. There was no waste. And like a lot of people say, what did you do with the bones? Well, with the moose you boil the bones and made your moose stock, right? (Dawn)

Andrew echoed Dawn's observations, sharing an encounter with a hunter:

But I asked this guy, I said, he was hunting moose right, I said, oh good. What are you going to do with the hide? And he said, oh, I don't have it. So, he left it in the bush and I didn't say anything to criticize him or that, you know, but that's how it is..... And some people wanna go and kill like 4 or 5 moose a year. Why? Why do you have to do that? Unless they're sincerely trying to take care of their whole community, but a lot of these guys don't even want to share their food that much, they're really quiet about it, right?

Dawn and Andrew offered critical insight into how food values have changed over time.

The lack of sharing was a concern for many of the Elders, who felt that we had strayed from our original understandings of the gifts of Creation. This carries particular resonance in the face of changing landscapes in Cree territory; resource extraction and flooding have made finding food a challenge:

But over the years, our hunting and our fishing spots are no longer as productive as before because of what's happening with pollution in the water, mercury in the fish, the spawning areas are being taken away by hydro dams, the rivers are drying up, they're getting polluted, you don't want to eat the fish from there. The fish that I usually eat now is from way far in the bush, away from everything, where the food is still fresh, the fish anyway. Like a lot of the areas that we used to hunt are all fenced in. You can't go to these areas we used to hunt before, it's really difficult, it's really challenging nowadays to live off the land. (Nathan)

Ed also described the effects of resource extraction and development:

Hydro has changed the way we live. Logging companies have impacted the way we live. It's destroyed the foods that we eat, the medicines that we harvest, the berries. So, the all-mighty dollar, I think it really speaks to the short-sightedness of western way of life. Really super short-sighted. They don't see beyond today.

The Elders spoke to a need to re-establish the teachings of sharing and caring in our communities regardless of, *and* because of, colonialism. Importantly, they shared their desire to see this begin at all ages. Lily talked about the need for re-education:

It's sad to see when, especially diabetes has ravaged our people so much and you see them and you know there's nothing on earth that's going to be able correct the damage that already happened. Where do you look? Where do you look? You have to look at the young people and even that and even the children, even the preschoolers, to begin to put these thoughts into their minds so that they don't end up the same way that maybe their parents or their grandparents have from the

destruction of these diseases. I think, I really believe that that's where our answers lie is in the re-education, starting at a very young age. Even prenatally.

All Elders spoke to the importance of re-education and exposure to traditional teachings, including language, ceremonies, songs, plant knowledges, and respectful harvesting, hunting and fishing practices. As Lily mentions above, the youth are a critical audience for this re-learning.

Dawn explained how important it is to work with families:

I see so many young people nowadays, they're not sharing with their children. And a lot of families are being pulled apart, there's a bigger, a larger separation rate between families. And we have so many kids in care and these poor children are put into this care of other people, not their own mom and dad. And I think they're missing out on a lot. This is why I like to do things with having the parents with the kids doing the stuff.

Traditional teachings support an enhanced awareness of the responsibility that we have with, and to, all of Creation. From here, we can learn how to be in communion with the land and each other. As Jeff shared, teaching one another is part of our responsibility:

And our understanding from our Creation story, and we do have a Creation story. And that Creation story is that we came from the spirit world and becoming to live a life here in this world, that we have a process to and a responsibility to teach the ones how to connect to the land. And, you know, the translations to the land are very, there's spiritual translations and there's physical translations. And the process to that is we tend to articulate our language more in depth to the spirit rather than just a physical thing.

Learning about these relationships and re-learning our original understandings of the role of plants and animals, for example, is part of spiritual learning. Andrew explained:

It's not only, yeah, it's necessary but there was a sacredness to it in that these plants and these animals, fish, they made a covenant with Creator to give themselves, to offer themselves to us. So, but there was a, there was like things to that would happen like hunting laws, right, they would talk to you about them. You know, what to hang on the tree after you're done with the bones or what certain bones can go in the water, which ones don't. You know, do you point the antlers towards the home, when you're eating do you pray with your, talk to your relatives before you go take their life, you know?

Andrew further described how this learning (and re-learning) is part of healing:

Understanding the different roles that certain animals and food sources played for us in our lives. And how they came to be with us. So, I think, if you missed out on that, like if you don't understand that part, then you kinda don't, there's an essence of that healing factor that you're missing out on too, right?

Sharing is an important value in Cree culture. Food is meant to be shared and experienced with one another: "We need to feed ourselves and we also need each other, sitting together and eating together.... We're in community with each other, when we eat together" (Eric). There is a strong relationship between sharing food and traditional teachings that include roles and responsibilities. These are found in rites of passage, that the Elders admit are not seen as much these days. Teresa offered the story of her brother's first moose kill:

It was a milestone; do you know what I mean? So now they have the skills to kill a moose and I remember when my oldest brother killed his first moose and then my mom was just dancing and she's making all these calls to my aunts, you have to come. Well, everybody needed to come. They didn't have to be asked, they knew what was going to happen. And they did prepping. And then when they brought the moose everybody was dancing, being really happy and yeah. Because of the kinship system, my aunts, they treated my brother like royalty. So, it was such a big thing in the community, in the family. Because that's a role, that's a responsibility he has, right? Now he can provide for the family and take care of the family.

While the value of sharing has been altered by colonial processes such as a lack of a safe and accessible land base and harvesting restrictions, it is a value that can be re-learned.

Nora explained that it's easy to start to reclaim these traditions, "It's as simple as a cup of tea. When you go into an Elder's home and she makes tea for you, that's a beautiful teaching in itself." Nora shared a recent story of visiting an Elder for work, and the feeling of being fed:

We were just taken back by her generosity and her kindness. She told us, you know, that she had taken the time to dry the meat and this is what my mom used to do, like this Elder is in her 70s. My mom used to enjoy this, she said. She lived for this food. Her mom and her dad lived on it. This is what our people lived on, they lived off the land and they, she said, we were always taught, when someone came out to visit, we had to bring out tea, we had to bring out our food, even if it was the last piece of meat in the fridge, we had to bring it out and we had to share it, we had to share it with our visitors.

The role of Elders in the community is vital for re-education of the mind and spirit. Elders are role models, supporting helping and healing practices. Nathan described his role: “Be the example as an Indigenous person, be the example that you can live a good life without putting those kinds of things in your body.” However, in seeking support and knowledge, Ed offered advice, and caution, for moving forward:

But for me, what is of singular, of singular importance is and this is what I was looking for as I began to look for a teacher, I was clear in what I wanted. I wanted to learn Cree. And just Cree. I didn't want to learn Ojibway, Dakota or Sioux. I wanted to learn Cree and I wanted that because of what I learned as a young boy and what I was told as a young boy is that while there are many types of trees, of willows, of birds all over the world, all over the world there's all different kinds, no one bird, no one willow, no one tree is trying to tell another of their kind how to be.

Feeding community becomes an important mechanism in resisting and healing from the impacts of colonization. Ed's own journey speaks to how important it is to seek a teacher from one's own heritage; Cree people seeking to learn Cree teachings, values, principles, epistemologies, Cree foods and food practices. This is part of how we feed ourselves, but also our communities; these undertakings are an act of building a community, and a nation. Indeed, as Dawn articulated:

We're all visitors to this land; our land has so much to offer. Our land is full of medicines our bodies need but we're only passing through. With respect, our purpose is to watch, to learn, to grow, to love, and to teach. Then, we'll return home.

The work of feeding our communities was described by the Elders in both direct and indirect ways. For example, the value of sharing is critical in Cree food systems and was

talked about by all of the Elders, with the direction to always feed each other, to offer nourishment (physical, spiritual, and emotional) and care. Indirectly, though also actionable, is the work that we must do to ensure the safety of the land and the sustainability of our food sources through strong relationships to the land. This is part of the larger backdrop of feeding community: learning traditional teachings and ways of hunting, fishing, growing, and harvesting so that our future generations have the same food sources available to them. And so that we may also continue to feed our ancestors the food sources that were available to them. There is much to learn from the land, and the Elders describe land as healer, but also responsibility. The Elder's food stories offer promise and opportunity. It is up to us, as Indigenous peoples, to take on the work that the Elder's describe as being necessary for our healing and for re-building our food systems. The following chapter offers the ways that we can begin to consider and operationalize our ancestral responsibilities and the work of healing.

Chapter 5: Discussion

My academic path has taken me through the natural sciences and into social work and native studies for my doctoral work. Through ecology, I learned the processes and practices of all living things as part of an interconnected whole. Through Indigenous social work, I discovered the power of context, place, patterns of behaviour, intergenerational trauma, and reclaiming our own ways of helping and healing, more connections and interconnections.

Indigenous peoples experience higher than average levels of food insecurity and diet-related diseases. We experience higher levels of incarceration, substance abuse, poor health outcomes, poverty, and homelessness (Loppie Reading & Wien, 2009). These issues are interconnected; part of a greater whole. The erasure of Indigenous peoples' cultures, lands, and bodies is systemic, coordinated, and rooted in old and dangerous assimilative ideologies. To be more like the dominant society, we are told, subtly and overtly, would mean less hardship. I began this research to examine the role of food in Cree helping and healing practices. What I found was an abundance of rich knowledges, practices, processes, beliefs, and principles of Cree culture as a means of taking care of the self, the community, and the nation through food. I interpret this as we know how to take care of ourselves. We always have.

As Indigenous peoples we are more than statistics; we are more than people in need of help. We are also more than our experiences and responses to colonialism. Sometimes we have to go back in time, to sit with the Elders to learn about the old ways, the old practices so that we move forward. This discussion is a series of insights, including my own, following my time with the Elders. I make a deliberate attempt in this discussion not to place the Elders stories within the literature as points of comparison. Rather, given the direction that the Elders provided in terms of how to re-create, re-vitalize, and re-build a Cree food system, I attempt to operationalize the ideas shared throughout the feeding metaphors. I am interested, and so are the Elders, in how to

move forward. I endeavor to converse with the literature and the Elders stories in ways that consider how to re-build. Feeding each other, feeding our ancestors, and feeding our communities is the way out of a colonized food system that continues to perpetuate harms to Indigenous lands and bodies. It was what we had before colonization, what has survived colonization, and what is on the other side of colonization. I wanted to consider the direction that the Elders provided through feeding. What would it mean to bring these values, stories, and perspectives into the Indigenous food sovereignty discourse? How does this align with notions of healing, especially set against an ongoing colonial backdrop? I also use a narrative voice in order to describe my own experiences as someone with a major illness committed to finding ways of being well. Placing myself in my discussion is a critical tool of decolonial research. After all, my presence – that I am still here – is “evidence” that Indigenous ways of helping and healing are powerful. These writings are shared in italics, as below.

The Poem

My neurologist wrote a poem about a young patient who died when doctors couldn't figure out what was wrong with her. They give up, send her on her way to death. I imagine hands grasping the edge of a cliff, the strain and the weight of holding on too much to bear. The terror and freedom of letting go. The poem is about me.

Social work: Does food belong?

Food, as an area of study, fails to fall under many disciplines, despite being an interdisciplinary subject. This mimics the way that food is siloed by the state. In some instances, the study of food is considered its own discipline, but still viewed in parts and pieces: agriculture is separate from water conservation is separate from health, and so on. These siloes represent the capitalist desire to remove food from the land in order for development agendas to continue. The

lack of interdisciplinary interest in food, particularly in social work, points to how food is undervalued in our society. One thing should be clear from this research: food is political. It has been used as a weapon, a tool of control and dependence on the state, that actively works against Indigenous ways of knowing, being, seeing, and doing. The Elders spoke to this throughout our conversations. They explained how Cree understandings, roles, and responsibilities around food have changed as a result of colonialism. The Elders named and spoke to colonialism directly: the impacts and losses Cree cultures have faced due to hydro-electric dams, residential schools, land-use and harvesting regulations, to name but a few.

Food is most often presented as a means to avoid food insecurity and a conduit to receive nutrients (Power, 2008). But in an Indigenous context, food is much more. Food, as the Elders shared, contains spirit; it is medicine; it is a source of connection and reciprocity to the land and our ancestors; and, it is the means of passing cultural knowledge generationally. Other Indigenous authors have echoed these notions: food as a source of well-being (LaDuke, 2005); food as place-based ecological knowledge (Anderson, 2011); food as currency, through the revitalization of historic trade processes (Delormier et al., 2017); food as sustainable self-determination (Corntassel [Cherokee], 2008); food as connection to traditional territory; and food as “relationship to plants and animals that give themselves as food” (Coté, 2016, p. 12). Despite outlining the importance and potentialities of food in Indigenous cultures, we are still faced with a colonized food system, one that has largely been ignored in the social work literature.

One of the biggest surprises for me coming into social work was and is the absence of literature on food. I assumed food would be prevalent in social work because hunger is a form of oppression and trauma. It stunts growth, physically, emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually. For those who face the difficult task of what to choose at the grocery store on a limited or non-

existent budget, there is considerable stress, not to mention issues of malnutrition (Tarasuk et al., 2013). When I first started researching the topic of feeding Indigenous peoples in Canada, I felt the clearest connection to social work would be through discussing food security. However, as I began writing and researching, I realized that Indigenous experiences of hunger were about racism (Robin et al., 2020). Social work should care about all forms of racism; it perpetuates the capitalist beliefs that meritocracy and productivity are key to success, that there is only one version of success and Indigenous peoples do not fit that version. My experience in social work has been strange. Outside of a few colleagues, my work and my presence have been ignored. While my work has received more attention in food studies, for the last ten years, I have been told my work is too political and too emotional. I have been told that food studies is no place to discuss racism despite the prevalence of racism in our food systems. Once, in writing about the safety of Indigenous women on the land in the face of man camps¹³ as part of Indigenous food systems, an editor told me that discussions on violence against Indigenous women were irrelevant.

I worry that in failing to see the connections between food and Indigenous women and violence, we are failing to see food in its fullest capacity. The comments from the editor made me consider: what exactly are people eating if they think food is apolitical? I do know that our failure to hold up food, to re-consider our relationships to food and the land, is detrimental for all of society, but most specifically for Indigenous peoples. I am certain no one would argue against their desire to breathe clean air, drink clean water, eat safe food that is free from contaminants. And yet, people of the land, who eat food from the land, are at the front lines of defending the land, where they experience state violence, jail time, and considerable fines for their efforts

¹³ For more information on the effects of man camps in food systems, see the MMIWG Inquiry Report (2019), and also Honor the Earth's (n.d.) Man Camp fact sheet, found here: https://www.honorearth.org/man_camps_fact_sheet

(Manuel & Derrickson, 2015). Where is the rest of society? And how can we call social workers to support the driver of colonialism and also Indigenous well-being: the land?

Indigenous peoples have visions for their futures and their present, as the Elders described in this research: being well, reconnecting to land, spirit, culture, and language. And yet, we continue to repeat the mistakes of the past: no longer will Indigenous children be placed in residential schools and removed from their food cultures, but they will be apprehended and removed from their food cultures. No longer will Indigenous food sources be eradicated in the name of clearing the plains, but Indigenous lands will now feature mines, dams, and pipelines, all sources of toxic contaminants (LaDuke, 2020). Social work should care because this is the fundamental backdrop for understanding Indigenous peoples' involvement in social work: oppression, marginalization, colonization. Beyond the recognition of Indigenous social work (Coulthard, 2014), the enactment and support of Indigenous social work, is warranted and timely. Indigenous social work seeks to “address oppression, inequities, the influence of social structures and policies on individuals, and social justice” (Hart, 2015, p. 807). There is room for food within Indigenous social work – it is Indigenous social work, as the Elders described. Social work also needs to reckon with and re-consider all of the ways Indigenous peoples have hungered. Food should extend to all social work for all peoples.

More important, we must hold up food in all its potentialities: as medicine, as healer, and as helper. We must ensure that all people, at all times, have access to safe, nutritious food. And we must move out of the way of Indigenous movements that are reclaiming their land-based and ancestral food systems.

What I Know

I carry a snapshot of the poem written by my neurologist on my phone. At times, I pull it up and read through it, repulsed by the intimacy of this shared experience and yet relieved to see it in words. My insides don't match my outsides. I don't look sick exactly, and yet I feel as though I wear my bones and blood and strained heart on the outside of me. Poem equals proof. Reading Hegel and Memmi, I think, I know this struggle. It is that of colonization, but also illness. You see, doctors have thought I am crazy, but I know that my illness today manifests itself from the inside out, my scarring and trauma searing through me. I know that I carry the abuse of my ancestors, as well as my own, and it lives in my blood.

Indigenism and the prefix "Re"

The Elders spoke, at length, about the need to re-learn and re-invigorate traditional practices and processes in order to be well. They described healing as a life-long endeavour that involves sacrifice and commitment. And yet, healing can also be a form of liberation, a freedom from the traumas placed upon Indigenous peoples, in their lives and livelihoods and bodies. Simpson (2004) explains: "recovering and maintaining Indigenous worldviews, philosophies, and ways of knowing and applying those teachings in a contemporary context represents a web of liberation strategies Indigenous peoples can employ to disentangle themselves from the oppressive control of colonizing state government" (p. 373). Reclamation and recovery are key words in the literature by Indigenous peoples: "Terms like reclaim, reconnect, recover and revitalize are used to characterize a desire and fulfill a vision of grand healing that is occurring" (Absolon, 2009, p. 194). These ideas emphasize talking back to the colonizer by enacting traditional teachings, values, worldviews and ways of knowing, in essence, by *being* Indigenous. Hart (2009) explains Indigenism, in part, as "a local phenomenon, where our spiritual and

cultural roots are protected and *entrenched* in the people” (p. 32, emphasis added). I emphasize entrenched to capture the ways that culture is alive in our daily lives and interactions.

I have presented these “re” ideas throughout the results, but more specifically as feeding community. To feed community means to re-claim, re-value, re-vitalize and re-learn the teachings around our relationships with the land and each other. It means using our culture to feed the hunger, spiritually and physically. Feeding community means considering the seven generations we hold sway over, as Elder Victor described. In order to ensure food stocks for future generations, we must make a commitment to re-learning and re-claiming traditional harvesting practices. Embedded within the teachings are instructions for how to live in good relation with the world around us. For example, the Elders discussed concerns around fishers and hunters overharvesting or taking too much without giving back to the community or land. This speaks to an absence of the teachings around why, when, and how we harvest, leading to an imbalance in relationships with the plant and animal worlds. This is not to discredit the reality that food stocks are depleting and are further threatened by resource extraction and industrial pollution; but rather, it speaks to understanding our roles and responsibilities as Cree peoples in ensuring the safety of sustainability of these foods (Anderson, 2011; Makokis et al., 2020). These are the teachings that can provide a road map for life: we must be and do.

A hunter will only be successful if they are careful and quiet. A medicine person trying to locate a certain healing plant will only be given the gift of finding that plant if they are deliberate and slow. Indigenous ways of seeing the world, and ways of seeing *in* the world, are based on connection and a balance between being and doing. (Methot [Cree], 2019, p. 231)

Being and doing means that we need to shake off the colonial influences that have first told Indigenous peoples these ways were problematic, less than, heathen-like, or savage (Starblanket, 2017). The prefix “re” serves as a tool to take us there. It prevents against our erasure, works to see Indigenous peoples in all of their humanity. “Re” reminds us that we are not empty or broken, and that our ways have not been forgotten. I recall at the beginning of my Master’s research ten years ago the number of people who asked if I would be able to find enough communities practicing traditional and land-based food practices for my research. In reality, there were more examples than I could adequately cover. The inference is, of course, loss. The prefix “re” reminds us that all is not lost, that we are not empty vessels, but contain the spirit and knowledge of our ancestors, through processes such as blood memory, as described by Linklater (2014): “The Creator gave us blood history, through those customary laws and customary law principles that we get reminded, we never lose anything because of our blood history and it is always there...” (p. 639). “Re” is a powerful addition to the language around Indigeneity, and one that must continue to be explored.

Chasing the Cure

I feel as though I have entered a club, a rite of passage where everyone and their neighbour has a story of someone they know with a condition similar to mine that was cured. Ah, I think, you know the secret! At my most desperate, I found momentary comfort in a number of alternative therapies. I have learned to meditate and took the shots and the pills and the vitamins and more pills, bought the oils and the crystals, started walking and stopped, all to help ease the symptoms of my illness; all to try to re-establish a sense of power that I once had over my body and its outcomes. Only after I had exhausted all other options that did not work did I turn to my own

people's medicine. Here is the truth: the first time I saw a medicine woman my life changed for the better. A last resort, yes, but I was afraid to trust my own people. I saw them as the source of sadness and grief and bruises.

We Are All Cycles

When I began this research, I had no idea that I would learn about the stars. But in Cree understandings of the world, this is where we begin. Thus, I start here:

Ininew mythology states that we are the Star People. When Creator created *misewa* (all that is), a piece of Creator was placed into each new Creation. This is why *assiniuk* (stones) are animate, not inanimate. All things made by Creator have *achak* (spirit). Inside us, there is a piece of Creator, and this is how we are related to all things. We are taught that Creator can never die, for Creator created death. Thus, the part of Creator that is inside of us – spirit – can never die. We move on, continuing to experience life, to learn, teach and explore. We arrive on Earth through a being of energy called *Achakos Iskwew* (Star Woman). Some people call these beings of energy *kisikookuk* (beings of light). (Buck [Cree], 2018, p. 12)

The Elders talked about cycles at length: the cycles of life; the cycles of growth and development; the cycles of minerals and energy in *matootsan*; the cycles of nutrients in our food; and the cycles of helping. In many ways, the understanding of cycles helped me to make meaning of the stories offered and supported the metaphor of feeding. I offer a few important examples below.

Ed explained how in Cree language, the words for food, to eat and to defecate are connected: *meechim*, *meechi*, and *meechita*, respectively. This was a powerful reminder that we are meant to eat food that comes from the land so that it may return to the land. In this way, we are feeding ourselves and the land, our waste a kind of organic nourishment. This process has

been interrupted, of course. Eating store-based foods that our ancestors would not recognize is common. These foods are often cheap, fast, nutrient poor and calorie dense which makes sense in the context of lack of access to fresh foods and the high cost of foods in the north. These foods also contain ingredients that are not meant to return to the land: dyes, chemicals, plastics. In exploring the reclamation and enactment of traditional and ceremonial food practices, these outside influences have once again interfered with our ability to be and do Indigenous. Doing and being Indigenous does, in part, require close attention to the cycles that surround us.

Natural cycles – those found in nature – teach us about our roles and responsibilities in the world. They also teach us about reciprocity, sharing, balance, and harmony. Kimmerer (2003) describes:

In indigenous ways of knowing, it is understood that each living being has a particular role to play. Every being is endowed with certain gifts, its own intelligence, its own spirit, its own story. Our stories tell us that the Creator gave these to us, as original instructions. The foundation of education is to discover that gift within us and learn to use it well. These gifts are also responsibilities, a way of caring for each other. Wood thrush received the gift of song; it's his responsibility to say the evening prayer. Maple received the gift of sweet sap and the coupled responsibility to share that gift in feeding people at a hungry time of year. (p. 100)

Many of the Elders shared their own learning and healing journeys to describe how they came to their roles in community today. As the Elders communicated, once they began the journey of healing themselves and learning traditional and ceremonial practices, they began helping and working with others. Helpers helping themselves to help others. Indigenous communities have long been the targets of community development projects, but what I heard being shared is that

we have processes and practices around community self-development. Indeed, Makokis et al. (2020) argue that enacting the roles, relationships, and responsibilities within our families is the “essence of relational accountability” (p. 38). I see cycles – the reverence for, and attention to, as critical for self-determination. Cycles in Cree ways of knowing, being, seeing, and doing mimic nature, which takes care of itself without human interference. Imagine a future in which Indigenous communities are liberated from colonial interference and our natural cycles are allowed to thrive.

Common Denominator

I share my fears with my teacher, my sadness and shame, at being both Indigenous and not Indigenous enough. I am holding on to the past, looking for ways to understand what happened to my family. He says, the common denominator is not being Indigenous. The common denominator is oppression.

Indigenous Knowledges as Food Literacy

The food concepts that the Elders discussed describe the practices and processes of eating well. Many of these concepts were contained within the Cree language. I am not a language speaker, and so much of my understanding is limited. However, the Elders were patient and kind as I began to examine Cree words and their meanings. Importantly, as the Elders explained, their meanings extend beyond straight translation: as Ed stated, *ininimina* are not just berries that are blue. In learning the translations and meanings of the berries, and indeed, *meechim* itself, it was clear that the language contains guidance for how to eat. As a reminder, food is *meechim*, eating is *meechi*, and defecation *mechita*. The similarity in the roots of these words signal a land-based diet in which food comes from the land and waste returns to the land, a valuable teaching in itself: eat food from the land.

Nutrition literacy refers to an “area of competence upon which healthy dietary behaviour depends” (Krause et al., 2016, p. 379) while food literacy is described as including “the knowledge, skills, and practices that enable citizens to participate more effectively in a sustainable and equitable food system” (Powell & Wittman, 2018, p. 195). Both are closely tied to the concept of health literacy, which is sometimes used interchangeably with food literacy (for a more rigorous debate on terminology see Krause et al., 2016). Regardless the terminology used, nutrition education is a blooming field, and Indigenous peoples, especially those with diabetes, are often the targets of such undertakings (Mosby, 2014).

The idea that Indigenous peoples require food literacy, nutrition literacy, and/or health literacy can be traced back to colonization and ongoing colonialism. Historically, Indigenous peoples were seen as lacking the ability to adequately feed themselves. Because the government destroyed food systems and legislated poverty, rations were introduced to Indigenous communities. Notably, these rations were foods that were foreign to Indigenous bodies. Flour, pork, and pig lard were introduced foods, as were sugar and salt. Patterns of shame around eating began early as Indigenous peoples were told their diets were inferior and they, as a people, in need of civilization (Daschuk, 2013). Mosby (2014) shares the government’s stance on northern Cree peoples’ malnutrition and starvation in the 1940s:

They have abandoned the native eating habits of their forefathers and adopted a semi-civilized, semi native diet which lacks essential food values, brings them to malnutrition and leaves them prey to tuberculosis and other disease. The white man, who unintentionally¹⁴ is responsible for the Indians’ changed eating habits, now is

¹⁴ The term unintentional here is contentious and at odds with the works of scholars who have documented otherwise (for example, Daschuk, 2013; Lux, 2001; Monchalin, 2016; Mosby, 2013; Mosby, 2014; Shewell, 2004).

trying to salvage the red man by directing him towards proper food channels.

(Library and Archives Canada, 1948, cited in Mosby, 2014, p. 50)

Government directions towards eating properly include the use of family allowances to guide food purchases:

For instance, whereas all other Canadians received cash payments, so-called bush Indians received their family allowances as an in-kind payment limited to certain “essential” foods and clothing items and the foods chosen were often justified by their fit within the nutritional ideal of the Food Rules. (Mosby, 2014, p. 50)

These Food Rules had little regard for land-based foods, further altering Indigenous peoples’ relationships to their food systems. Colonial interventions extended to land-based food practices and relationships. For example, Indigenous women were indoctrinated by European women so that they would leave the bush and enter into the kitchen, the “proper” place for women to be (Acoose [Anishinaabe/Métis/Saulteaux], 2016). Yet, history and the stories of the Elders tell us that women played central roles in food procurement, that gendered roles were not relevant in the face of survival (Anderson, 2011).

The assumption that Indigenous peoples were, or are, without “essential food values” is dangerous and incorrect. Indeed, throughout this research project, I was awed at the ways that the Elders talked about food as sacred. It was always with reverence. Not romanticism, nor desire, nor even enjoyment (though that was mentioned occasionally), but with respect. It is understood that food deserves and teaches respect, a central value to Cree culture. Indeed, there is a system of knowledge that supports and guides Indigenous food systems.

Indigenous food knowledges refer to the complex and myriad ways that Indigenous peoples’ food knowledge is actualized: from ceremonial knowledge such as songs and

ceremonies, nutrition education, and language to plant knowledges and skills such as butchering, drying, and preserving meat. Indigenous food knowledges are values-based and have a theoretical underpinning that includes deep, reciprocal connection to the ancestral and natural worlds. This is because food is understood as a gift from Creator. As part of the gift, we are to activate, practice, and enact the values of Cree food systems. This ensures we are maintaining our ancestral responsibilities, responsibilities that are contained within Cree teachings, values, worldviews, languages, and naming systems. These are central components in Indigenous food systems that are often forgotten; more attention is paid to the activities of Indigenous food systems such as growing and hunting (see Settee & Shukla, 2020, for example).

Beyond the language, the Elders also offer other guidance for how to eat. They explained what our diets should consist of: food from the land; food that your ancestors will recognize; and food that is Indigenous to your nation. I think of this in comparison to Michael Pollan's (2009) famous food rules: real food is what your grandparents recognize. I also think of how blueberries are marketed as a "superfood" and part of many heralded healthy diets. Rather than use outside sources and teachers, and rather than more interventions by government, academics, and non-profits, the enactment of Indigenous food systems must come from within community. Community members are key teachers in this way; as language speakers, hunters, trappers, medicine people, and ceremonialists, Indigenous peoples have much to offer in the ways of eating.

The Elders also spoke of Indigenous foods as containing relationships, which are also foundational to Cree culture (Hart, 2009). Wilson (2008) describes these relationships as sacred: "knowledge itself is held in the relationships and connections with the environment that surrounds us" (p. 87). Land-based food is the source of energy from the sun, moon, stars,

wind, water, and all of Creation. That energy transfers to us as we eat; we are the products of all of the relationships in Creation. In eating land-based food, we also nourish our spirits and acknowledge the gift that Creator has set forth for us (Dennis & Robin, 2020). I have been taught, for example, not to cook when experiencing anger or sadness lest my energies transfer through to those who eat what I have cooked. Food knowledges are relational accountability in practice: through re-learning food knowledges and practices, Indigenous peoples can live with and within their land-based food systems in such a way that honours each other, Creation, ancestors and community. These food knowledges are the key to beginning the process of feeding our communities once again.

Disordered Eating

For a year, I eat an iron-enriched diet and take supplements three times daily, but the lack of iron in my blood stays consistent. I am scared of how sick I am. Each day I come home from work and go straight to bed at 5:30 in the afternoon. When I wake in the morning, it feels as though I haven't slept at all. I begin to eat only iron rich and iron enriched foods. I cut sugar and simple carbs out of my diet. I become so militant that my fear spreads to food. I feel like a fraud; I am afraid of food. I tell my teacher that I am conducting my own nutrition experiments. He tells me that my joke is not funny. This marks a decline of my mental health, a spiral of symptoms that not one of my eight doctors notice. Finally, after almost two years, I see a new specialist who sends me to the hospital to have iron administered intravenously. He apologizes, says "I am sorry we have failed you." Because in between the diets and worry, I almost die. I convulse in a pool and am lifted out. I lose consciousness while driving and wake in a ditch. I am so tired of being so sick and tired.

Land-Based Learning and Healing as Indigenous Food Sovereignty

The Elders were all in agreement with their desire to see more land-based initiatives in community. These include land-based learning both in and outside of school, land-based ceremonies, land-based healing programs, community camps, and youth programming. At a practical level, healing and learning endeavors on the land promote activity, fresh air, and attention to the natural world, all elements that support being well. From a Woodlands Cree perspective, the land is an umbilical cord, essential for Cree culture and worldview (Michell, 2018). Thus, it is important that our re-learning begin with the land. As Ed shared in his interview, land is where spirit is strongest. To return back to the land means to re-capture culture, belonging, identity, and well-being (McGuire–Kishebakabaykwe, 2010). However, I am cautioned by the words of Maracle [Sto:lo] (1996), who reminds us: “We don’t have to “go back to the land.” We never left it” (p. 109). There is tension here, of course. Colonization is characterized by land dispossession; colonialism by the removal of people from land, culture, and family through assimilation, subjugation, and oppression (Coulthard, 2014; LaRocque, 2010; McCallum, 2017; Monchalin, 2016). And yet, Maracle’s words ring true: we are of the land and that has never changed, though that connection may be hidden deep within us. But if we are also to speak of ancestral knowledges, responsibilities, and blood memory, then we must also acknowledge that land is part of us.

Wildcat et al. (2014) argue that because colonization is about land dispossession, decolonization must involve forms of learning from the land. The power of land as teacher has been well documented (Basso, 1996; Michell, 2018; Simpson, 2014; Wildcat et al., 2014). Yet, less information is paid to the relationship between learning from the land as acts of healing. We tend to separate these roles, but according to the Elders, there is no separation: learning is healing is land. Counselling is an ancient process for Indigenous peoples, who have pursued guidance

and support from community helpers and the land since time immemorial (McCormick, 2009). As Absolon (2009) states, “the act of helping people doesn’t always occur only in an office. For years, our ancestors and relations lived outside, and healing ceremonies occurred in tandem with spirit helpers and with elements of the earth” (p. 174).

Studies that document land-based healing offer great promise, though tend to focus on healing and learning for youth rather than adults. For example, in sharing stories of Project George, a land-based youth initiative in Moose Cree First Nation, Métis scholar Janice Gaudet (2021) argues that the land teaches and models resiliency, a concept critical for Indigenous youth. Project George has much to offer in terms of its model: a land-based camp that youth attend to learn “by doing, observing and teaching Cree land-based skills” (p. 179). Resiliency¹⁵ is seen as critical for the care and growth of Indigenous youth, but it is no less applicable for adults. The emphasis of land-based programming on youth likely stems from the powerful role of youth in Indigenous culture (Makokis et al., 2020), and also the mis-understanding that Indigenous adults will have access to these skills and knowledges (Cidro et al., 2016). This is problematic because, as the Elders stated, re-learning needs to also occur with adults. Importantly, work with all community members means that youth who experience land-based learning and healing can continue their learning at home, with their parents and families. Indeed, some of these parents are the hunters and fishers that the Elders spoke about in their interviews; the same hunters and fishers whom the Elders referred to as being removed from the teachings of Natural Law.

Learning and re-learning from the land is healing and opportunities to do so must include Indigenous peoples of all ages. At the same time, attention to the spiritual aspects of land-based

¹⁵ Indeed, I am reminded of a teaching by Sherry Copenace, an Anishinaabe Knowledge Holder in the Master of Social Work based in Indigenous Knowledges at the University of Manitoba: would we need resiliency if we were raised to know our gifts, roles and responsibilities?

practices, including ceremony and respectful harvesting, are necessary in land-based endeavours. Land and spirit are inextricably linked. The spiritual components of land-based teachings are rooted in ancestral responsibilities towards the land and center our relationship with the natural world:

Cree trappers and hunters teach us the ethic of conservation, not to take more than what we need from the land and to respect the animals and plants that sacrifice their lives. The Cree language term *Pâstowin* refers to the violation of spiritual and natural laws of which there are repercussions even across several generations.

(Michell, 2018, p. 30)

Learning and re-learning must be seen as a cyclical process that can be modelled throughout generations, eventually creating a self-sustaining knowledge system in which learning and sharing occurs from and with each other. This is how we feed and nourish community; how the hunger abates. It is also Indigenous food sovereignty, though there is little reference to healing, helping and learning in the Indigenous food sovereignty literature which is too often focused on the mechanics of land-based food systems. Indigenous food sovereignty requires a deep commitment to engaging with the land. This can be through harvesting and planting, spiritual practice, ceremony, protesting, and advocating, teaching, learning, writing, singing, weaving baskets; the list goes on and on. This is similar to processes of learning, re-learning, sharing, and healing, which have many expressions but are all rooted in engagement with the land. The potential for Indigenous food sovereignty, like Indigenous healing and education, is enormous. If we ascribe to notions of cycles and promote Indigenism and anti-colonialism, we will find that we are able to undertake the work of feeding each other. But, for Indigenous food sovereignty to grow and thrive, we must first make investments in learning, re-learning, and un-learning.

On Shame

I am downtown, at the library, for a reading on National Indigenous People's Day. When we are leaving, I begin to feel woozy. I lose consciousness in the underground parking lot, and begin convulsing. My friend catches me and holds me as I shake. Security comes and orders my friends to get me off the property or they will call the police. They believe I am drunk. I don't remember this really, but I know when I came to there was fear in the air and my cheeks burned with shame.

Ancestral Responsibilities in a Modern World

More than half of the Elders spoke of concerns related to overharvesting and a lack of sharing they are witnessing in community. Historically, food shortages were seen not as an over-exploitation of the animals and land, but rather part of a larger spiritual imbalance (Stonechild [Cree-Saulteaux], 2016). Today, some traditional hunters still see their hunting as culturally significant and connected to emotional well-being (Lindholm, 2019). This speaks to the inherent connection between land, food, and spirit. Thus, re-acquainting ourselves with traditional teachings is necessary to understanding concepts such as balance. But it is not nearly enough to learn about balance; it must also be enacted in our food system. By taking on the work of learning about the teachings of the land, we can come back to the land in a new, old way that emphasizes respect, reciprocity, caring, and sharing, foundational Cree values.

Indigenous food scholars have long argued for a responsibility-based paradigm in describing Indigenous food systems (Coté, 2016; Morrison, 2011). Indigenous peoples in Canada are not a production-based peoples, but work to fulfill our responsibilities to our

ancestors and all of Creation. A responsibility-based paradigm aligns with Methot's (2019) ideas around being *and* doing. We must learn our traditional roles and responsibilities, languages and teachings of our nations to enhance and protect our food systems. A responsibilities-based paradigm for food sovereignty means people play a significant role in our food systems. The teachings and time spent with the Elders and on the land are critical components of Indigenous food sovereignty. Reluctance to learn these teachings and to examine the barriers preventing access to these teachings are the result of colonial legislation that serves to sever Indigenous peoples' relationships to the land.

Indigenous cultures have been subject to sweeping changes, many forced, as described in the previous sections. Over time, colonial interruptions have separated Indigenous peoples from their families, lands, and cultures, to their detriment. Today, we live in houses, use technology, and keep small computers in our pockets to organize sweat lodge ceremonies through texts and social media announcements. Surely, our ancestors would wonder at this new world. Culture, of course, is not static, nor are peoples. But does this mean that the past is lost to us, that the old teachings no longer fit in contemporary society? Or are the origins of the teachings so foundational to our Cree-ness that they must be maintained? Cree scholar Jeffrey Paul Ansloos (2017) offers some insight into these complications:

One of the struggles for Indigenous peoples on an Indigenizing path is they face criticism for not practicing ceremonies as they were once practiced. Some people, especially in Indigenous studies, critique Indigenous young people for attempting to reconstitute traditions as they or their families have come to understand it.... As an example, in my ritualized Cree life, it is not important whether you smudge. (p. 76)

Ansloos (2017) is, of course, correct. We cannot re-capture the past. I am not sure that we want to. But to relegate ideas from the past as no longer being relevant to us today is short-sighted. And while I do not want to perpetuate any feelings of shame around traditional teachings, I do think these old teachings still have so much to offer. Indeed, I believe they are a map for the way forward. Nuu-chah-nulth scholar Cliff Atleo Jr. (2012) shares that adaptation is necessary for survival, because our environments have changed so significantly, but that our responsibilities to the land remain the same. The Elders spoke about food with reverence. They talked about the language with reverence. They described the connections and interconnections between all elements of being through the language, by describing value systems, even by describing what we could learn from all of the loss. Elders serve the critical role of carrying the past with them, of having had sorted through the losses and beauty to make sense of the teachings in a modernized world. They reminded me that it is not all one or the other, but both. We can be both rooted in our ancestral teachings and apply them in a modern context.

To Believe

My medicine woman is a strong Cree Iskwe. She told me to imagine a pie chart, and that all of the pieces of the pie were the components to my healing. She explained that she was only a small piece of that pie. The larger pieces were about me: my ability and determination to do the work that needs to be done and the deal that I make with Creator about my healing. A sliver of self-determination in many ways. I have the ability to believe that I can find wellness, in spite of, and because of my dis-ease.

Trauma on the Land

There is a propensity within the literature to romanticize Indigenous relationships to the land (Hoffman, 2008), but there is nothing romantic about our current food system. While there

has been an incredible movement of reclamation of Indigenous food practices in the last ten years (Coté, 2016; Robin, 2019; Morrison, 2020; White [Mohawk], 2019), these initiatives are still confronted by the lack of adequate land protection in Canada. Their limiting factors include safe and clean air, water, soil, plants, and animals, a diminishing biodiversity, and warming climate. For hundreds of years, the land has been a source of colonial control. Early food patterns, practices, and processes were eliminated through reserve systems and government laws that removed Indigenous peoples from their traditional territories and practices (Monchalín, 2016). This was discussed by the Elders specifically through stories of prohibiting harvesting, practicing medicines, and gathering on the land.

As Jeff shared, these interferences and interruptions were a source of past trauma that informed the present: obesity deriving from a history of starvation. In examining the diet-related diseases facing Indigenous peoples, we must understand the deep desire to fortify one's body against hunger through food as a response to trauma. When you are being deliberately starved, your understanding of the world around you changes. Duran et al. (2008) echo Jeff's statement: "If the historical soul wounding is not effectively dealt with, each person, as well as his or her descendants, is doomed to experience and perpetuate various forms of psychic and spiritual suffering in the future" (p. 288). This wounding is present in our peoples and on our lands. From an Indigenous worldview, you cannot separate the two: trauma on the land will appear in our peoples (Settee, 2013).

To point to the land as a source of food, culture, and well-being, requires both access to, and safe, lands protected from the contaminant consequences of development (Waziyatawin, 2012). Despite encompassing only 0.2% of Canada, today, reserves are home to pipelines, hydro, mining, and other forms of resource extraction (Kino-nda-niimi Collective, 2014; McGregor,

2015; Pictou, & Bull, 2009; Waldron, 2018). The abuse of Indigenous women and two-spirit peoples, connected to the man camps these forms of development bring into community has brought further havoc on communities (Kuokkanen, 2008; National Inquiry into MMIWG, 2019). Issues around contaminants and pollution in Indigenous communities have been widely documented in the last decade, and have been linked to high rates of cancer (Kino-nda-niimi Collective, 2014; McLachlan, 2014). Indigenous communities have also witnessed the slow death of the seasons through global warming, with stories of climate change still fought to be heard (Whyte, 2017). The push for food security and Indigenous food sovereignty must center the land: without land protection, support, and legislation to protect water and food sources, IFS initiatives will act as band-aid solutions to a colonized hunger (Morrison, 2011; Morrison, 2020). Without safe lands, we are not safe. Without lands, the hunger will continue. Despite being the canaries in the coalmine, Indigenous peoples' knowledge of, and care for, the land has taken a diminished role, often ignored by policy makers, government, and scientists (LaDuke, 2005). The Elders' stories presented here contribute to the growing knowledge and concern for what has happened to the land: trauma.

At the same time, the Elders spoke of how our relations with the land must be strengthened. The systemic destruction of Indigenous lands and waters in the name of development has further exacerbated the us versus them dichotomy and the myth that Indigenous peoples are anti-progress and anti-development (Palmater, 2020). Importantly, Indigenous peoples are the only population with on-the-ground, lived experience and generational wisdom to be able to assert such claims of a changing landscape (Simpson, 2004). This is especially true for hydro development in Manitoba, which has pitted Indigenous peoples against development.

Hydro Development

Hydro development, flooding, loss of ancestral lands, including burial grounds, and forced relocation are common stories of the land in Cree territory. Yet, to date, little information is available on the long-term impacts of hydro development to Cree communities and their well-being. Nearly all of the Elders spoke to the effects Manitoba Hydro has had on their families, communities, and nations. They talked about life pre- and post- hydro, signaling the deep significance Hydro has had on Cree culture. Through hydro development projects in Manitoba, traplines have disappeared, moose habitats have been destroyed, contaminants such as mercury have resulted in the closure of local fisheries, fish stocks have declined, and entire communities have been relocated (Konefall et al., 2020; Hoffman, 2008; Loney, 1995; Martin et al., 2017). Less information is available on the social, cultural, and emotional effects of these losses (Ballard [Anishinaabe] et al., 2020; Konefall et al., 2020). Indeed, throughout the 80s and 90s, Manitoba Hydro maintained the position that Cree communities were already experiencing poverty before development began. Hydro was seen as a means to add jobs to communities, and a way to “integrate them into modernity” (Hoffman, 2008, p. 9). This is, of course, in contrast to Victor’s story of loss following Hydro development in his community; modernity brought more suffering. According to Loney (1995), these losses have contributed to a larger community or collective trauma. Cree scholar Neil McLeod (2007) argues the loss and removal from Indigenous stories is a form of spiritual exile, the removal of an Indigenous group from their land, spatial exile. Uncovering these traumas, as the Elders shared in our conversations, is critical to understanding how Indigenous relationships to the land have been altered. With more hydro activity on the horizon, the social impacts of hydro demands attention. As it stands, hydro development impedes any attempts at Indigenous food sovereignty in Manitoba.

Keyam

It is not a straightforward endeavour, my healing. It involves more trust than I imagined I had in me. I struggle, cry, scream, sweat, sing, and pray on repeat.

The Work of Healing

In speaking to the Elders, it was clear that healing takes work, commitment and sacrifice. As Lily stated, one must want to get well to be well. I have thought of this often in my exploration of the literature and have indeed questioned my own use of the word healing in my writing. Too often healing is presented as though it is a straightforward and linear process. Healing leads to being healed. Million [Athabaskan] (2013) offers caution in how healing is presented: “Within the auspices of something called human rights, we enact healing projects and self-determination. I think that while *healing* has become a ubiquitous word, there is less examination of the terms of this “healing” from a wound characterized as colonization” (p. 12). Other times, healing is presented as a romanticized vision of spiritual progress in which Indigenous peoples are connected to the land in such a beautifully painful way that leads to great rewards. Hill (2021) writes that definitions of healing must come from Indigenous peoples themselves. What this is lacking, of course, is the reality of healing as an emotional onslaught of trauma and pain, fear and doubt. Ansloos (2017) shares, “Facing pain is always a risk too. The outcome is never certain. However, healing rarely comes without risking” (p. 2). There is risk in healing, but that risk is not well-considered nor well-presented in the literature. To present healing romantically or as an end point releases settler colonialism from responsibility. It also serves to contain traumas as occurring in the past, as though the onslaught of racism, violence, social injustices and inequities Indigenous peoples face currently are not an issue that warrants healing.

At the same time, healing and wellness have become a multi-trillion-dollar industry. Spas and retreats now market, and sell, healing experiences. We are told that buying a candle or face cream can be healing. Yet, the wellness and healing industries have become exclusive spaces that perpetuate racism and cultural appropriation (Wilson, 2003). For example, the use of the medicine wheel has become ubiquitous in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous contexts. Sweat lodges are used by non-Indigenous people in business exploits and smudge sticks are sold in big box stores. Is it healing if others are suffering because of it? I have thought of this often during the pandemic, and particularly enjoy Rachel Ricketts' (2021) interpretation of health and wellness as "wealth and hellness" (p. 157). This is capitalism, and capitalist notions of "healing" do not align with Indigenous ways of healing, helping, or being well. When we harvest medicines, plants, or animals from the land, we do so with respect and not just in our hearts, but our hands and spirits. We communicate. We offer tobacco. We also pray, sing, celebrate, and honour life through various ceremonies. This is doing and being Indigenous; this is healing. Healing means to be released from hunger.

Healing the Systems

Indigenous peoples understand acutely what Canada seems to struggle with: colonialism is not over. It is embedded within systems, their foundations and ideologies. True reconciliation must take place in the structure of colonialism (Coulthard, 2014). The outcome can be healing and self-determination. In navigating a path forward, towards an Indigenized and anti-colonial food system that is part of a holistic framework for Indigenous healing, self-determination is not only necessary, but inevitable. As sovereign nations whose rights and responsibilities are held within Creation, Indigenous peoples and communities that re-create and implement processes for their own healing, eating, and well-being will inevitably be enacting self-determination. In many

ways, this is what the Elders were telling me: we have ways for teaching, learning, helping, healing, and interacting with the land. We have languages that describe healthy eating, ceremonies that teach the values of a relational food system, and our understandings of the world tell us about how to care for one another. It's all there, waiting for the taking. What could happen if these ways were fronted in community, rather than be sidelined as othered approaches? The possibilities are endless, but self-determination will still be a moving target because Canada's colonial project is ongoing. That is to say, we can begin the work of healing ourselves, but healing will be limited by the environment that we are in.

Linklater (2014) traces the emergence of contemporary Indigenous healing to health and social service programs introduced in First Nations communities following the Second World War. According to Couture [Cree] (1982), 1969-1970 marked the beginning of a movement towards Indigenous peoples' self-determination, though this period was also clouded by colonial control that "remained intact as the government could reduce or eliminate funding if they felt Indigenous organizations threatened Canada's access to Indigenous lands and resources" (Linklater, 2014, p. 36). Early healing initiatives emerged through social movements and the desire to support healing from addictions, abuse, and later trauma. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), for example, was created in 1991 following the events at Oka and as stories of abuse from residential schools emerged through public hearings.

RCAP (1996), and later, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) findings along with the Inquiry Report into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019), prominently feature healing and self-determination. RCAP (1996) first spoke of self-determination in the 90s and offered 440 recommendations to reform the relationship between Canada and Indigenous peoples. Later reports articulated that what has happened to Indigenous

peoples (and women, girls, and two spirit peoples, specifically) is genocide. The TRC presented 94 calls to action, while the Inquiry Report presented 231 calls to justice. These numbers speak to the myriad systemic challenges that surround and interfere with Indigenous peoples' daily lives; yet, little progress has been made in any of these recommendations.

In some cases, recommendations have been presented more than once: The Aboriginal Healing Foundation, for example, was developed in 2000 to support community healing initiatives following RCAP. While government funded, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF) was an Indigenous-led, non-profit foundation that worked to help create community-designed and community-led cultural programs based upon holistic healing and cultural revitalization (Dion-Stout & Kipling, 2003; Mussell, 2014). Sadly, the AHF was defunded and dismantled in 2010 causing “an immediate crisis in the healing movement as many counsellors and therapists had to terminate their therapeutic relationships with those who were accessing services” (Linklater, 2014, p. 46). The MMIWG Inquiry Report (2019) has since advocated for its return, the need and desire for Indigenous-led and operated healing endeavours ever present.

Indigenous healing is especially challenging because it is done under a colonial and societal gaze; according to a 2018 Angus Reid poll, 53% of Canadians surveyed felt that Canada apologizes too much for what happened in residential schools (Palmater [Mi'kmaq], 2020). When healing is held as a tool of the colonizers, as it is now, it is presented as an outcome, rather than pathway, and with a timeline. Canada and its citizens have described our healing as taking too long (how many times and how many Indigenous peoples have been asked: “Why can't you get over it?”). Healing becomes a tool of colonization when the government controls the backdrop: the living conditions, government and police interactions, and the systems that are supposed to support and protect all peoples. Perhaps the most concerning element of Indigenous

healing is that despite any and all efforts to revitalize and reclaim, the systems around us have not changed in any substantial way. Without healing the systems that harm people, we will keep placing people in harmful situations. There is simultaneous work to do here, but I would propose that healing from colonization in particular, should be undertaken by Indigenous peoples themselves. The push to change and decolonize the broken systems must extend to non-Indigenous peoples, in all places, at all levels of government. More radically, and more importantly, is the need for Indigenous peoples to dismantle and re-construct new systems, based on Indigenous and ancestral ways of knowing, seeing, being, and doing. I return to Simpson's (2011) argument on building our own houses: "Our Elders and Knowledge Holders have always put great emphasis into *how* things are done. This reinforces the idea that it is our own tools, strategies, values, processes, that are going to build our new house" (p. 32).

Otherwise, we will continue to be left with more studies that contain our stories. In a reconciliation study conducted with Indigenous organizations in Winnipeg, one participant shared:

People want to talk about us as sicknesses, talk about gangs, talk about poverty, talk about child welfare, talk about domestic violence, violence against women, all that is real but at the same time it is sourced, the source of it is in those systems. So what is being done at its source, that's a question of reconciliation. (Dicks, [Oji-Cree/Cree Métis scholar] 2016, p. 12).

Similar concerns were shared by families and participants of the MMIWG Inquiry (2019) process. The report provides a quote from family member, Melanie D.:

My biggest question is what is the government planning to do after this Inquiry? Like, what is the action plan? Because I hope it's not like RCAP [Royal Commission

on Aboriginal Peoples]. I hope it's not 94 Calls to Action where we have roundabout circle talks about reconciliation... And I'm not just placing that on the government, but.... what is Canada, all of Canada going to do? (p. 66)

The Calls to Action and Calls to Justice describe changes, processes, and practices that must be implemented to stop the genocide of Indigenous peoples. Without adequate resources and political will, Indigenous healing will continue to be a moving target. We can write about Indigenous healing practices or ceremonies, but we also need to write about, research, criticize and make space for healing the child welfare system, the education system, the health system, the food system, even if that means re-construction. Simpson (2017) has further called for the need for a radical resurgence, “an extensive, rigorous, and profound reorganizing of things” (p. 48). Given our current context of a global pandemic and racial reckoning, I see new ways forward, rooted in ancestral teachings, as necessary in navigating a path towards all healing. Radical resurgence, as Simpson (2017) proposes, can satiate Indigenous hunger. We can and must feed ourselves, our ancestors, and communities: this is Indigenism and anti-colonialism in action. Resurgence also requires my own movement: to take what was offered in these stories, share them out and work to re-build.

Breaking the Cycle

Healing requires the most difficult of tasks: to gut yourself open, to feel raw and scared and alone and from there to believe in the healing capacities of the land and of the people. But there is hope. Healers will heal to become healers who heal.

Closing Thoughts

This dissertation presents a series of stories, mine and the Elders and the scholars that surround me and center my work. I struggled for some time with ending this dissertation. I was worried that readers would interpret these as sad stories, too strong an emphasis on colonialism. I question my own voice, that has been guided, supported, and connected within many positive and nourishing ways throughout my time in academia, but also misaligned, viewed as too political. The truth is this dissertation and the Elder's stories are not sad stories. Instead, they are about hope. Cree cultures, like many Indigenous cultures throughout the world, have many ways of moving through the world, healthfully, dutifully, wholistically, and reciprocally. There is so much waiting for us, ready for the taking.

This is about hope because it is about caring for the land and each other, which is how we build and nurture life. There are maps in the stars that tell us stories about our relationships to the land. Nutritional guidelines in the language. Ways of honouring the life of the moose. Practices about caring for one another in our ceremonies. And so, my heart is full. Today I feel excited because I am going to be on my first student committee, the next generation of food sovereignty scholars and practitioners. This is part of the re-building of the food system: sharing and supporting the next generations as I have been supported so that they may do the same.

This is about hope because it is about direction, a pathway for moving forward. Food was used as a weapon to kill and subjugate us. Before that, and even throughout colonialism, it was used as a healer. Today, the Elders still understand it as a healer. It is time for us to step up and reclaim, to the best of our abilities. We owe it to our Elders and ancestors and unborn. There are many components to a Cree food system, as the Elders described through their stories. A Cree food system is living gratitude. It is reciprocal, cyclical, land-based, and geographically and spiritually connected to one's ancestors. In a Cree food system, you feed those that you have lost.

A Cree food system centers, as part of a living bundle of culture, the learning, teaching, and sharing of land-based food and spiritual practices. Indeed, it is our responsibility to do so as good ancestors.

Recently, I was asked where I want to go next in my work. What a great question, truly. Too often we focus on the negative, on the food insecurity and losses. I started my journey into Indigenous food sovereignty, as a study, but also as an embodied reality, ten years ago with the determination to tell good food stories. And through my Master's, I was able to do that. I have written about my own reluctance to take on any Indigenous research, because I had only ever been exposed to the disparities (Martens, 2015). Discovering the Indigenous food sovereignty movement and discourse felt true to my experience as an Indigenous woman. I did not ask about colonialism in my Master's, though it was mentioned repeatedly. I realized I needed to spend some time studying colonialism, specifically towards Indigenous bodies and their food systems, because of the deep and strong emotions I was witnessing around Indigenous peoples' food experiences. On a personal and professional level, I turned towards the trauma, rather than away, as a way of working through the trauma.

There has been a tremendous amount of loss in the colonization of Cree and other Indigenous food systems so these emotions make sense. Studying medical and food history and the histories of residential schools is not for the faint of heart. But to balance reconciliation, we must also do the work of truthing. We must unearth these stories so that the younger generations understand, so that we eliminate patterns of shame around the disparities. At least, that is true for my own healing. As I have begun to speak openly and directly about racism, colonialism, and sexual exploitation in the food system, people would come up to me afterwards and share their stories: "that happened to my family, they would say. That is my story too." And so, my bank of

knowledge, the storehouse I contain for holding these stories, continued to grow. I feel that we were, and are, opening up – doing the work of truthing – so that we may breathe again. Speaking up, and the negative repercussions that often emerge from the truthing, can feel heavy and intimidating. People leave their emotions with you, their anger, denial, sadness, and grief. This work is hard. But truthing is part of the work of Indigenous food sovereignty, and Indigenous scholarship, and will continue to be long as colonialism continues. We truth to dismantle and to liberate from the past.

It is time to start (and continue) re-building. That is the direction I want to go next in my work. I realize and have come to understand the dualities of Indigenous self in academia, the dualities of my own mixed Cree-ness, and the dualities of working with community and settlers. Learning to be *Sîpihkopinesîs* means acknowledging my dualities. They are built into who I am. Thank you to the Elders, Knowledge Holders, helpers, healers, teachers, ceremonialists, land-practitioners who have invested in my healing and who continue to keep this work alive. The Elders shared their stories with me, not so that they would end up on a dusty shelf. They told me stories about food in Cree culture to call out, and call in: take this knowledge and bring it to life. Learn it, live it, and carry it. Do something with it. Otherwise, the words are not valued in the same way because they are not actualized, there is no energy ascribed to them. Stories are alive. They ask for our attention. We listen and learn from stories so that we may enact. I take this journey, and all of the blessings I have received, and say, I am committed to breathing life into this work. And I am so excited for the future.

Talking about the future is important in Indigenous studies. Because we have visions for our future, as the Elders described: they are in our past, which is still intact, and has been modified in new ways, but is rooted in the fundamental teachings of what it means to be Cree.

Not with blood or bones, but with spirit. What is the spirit of this work for me? When I close my eyes, I can see a path for me, a path that takes my work through critical dietetics and nutrition education; through the devolution of oppressive policies, and alternative, Nation-led policies; and towards the principles of re-building a food system with co-conspirators in BIPOC communities. I hope to spend more time with the language, as I continue further seeking a Swampy Cree concept for food sovereignty. I think of *awawanenitakik*¹⁶, as Michelle Daigle (2016) writes, as being close to the larger concept of Indigenous food sovereignty as described throughout this research. But there are other concepts too, that have yet to be explored, and I believe contain further instructions for re-building.

The Elders taught me that we contain all of the maps to our futures, starting with ourselves, our ancestors and our then our communities. We must be committed to our own futures, so that we may leave the future generations in a better place, rather than continue to carry the colonial burdens that are so pervasive and persistent. But we have to go beyond recognition, beyond political identity towards what most accurately describes the processes and practices of Indigenous food sovereignty for Cree peoples. We must tune in to the language. There are intricacies here, of course. Ed describes not knowing beans as a traditional food through ceremony; yet, stories abound in community (less so in the literature) of periods of strong trade networks where corn was found in northern Manitoba. All to say, there is no one Cree food sovereignty, because our geographies, histories, stories, values, worldviews, and perspectives are specific to each nation. But the closer we can get towards targeting what

¹⁶ “Awawanenitakik can be translated as the importance of living an Omushkegowuk Cree way of life by acting according to our ancestors’ ontologies and the values and everyday actions that arise from such worldviews” (Daigle, 2016, p. 265).

Indigenous food sovereignty looks like from a Cree perspective, means the easier we can attend to our re-build.

Consider this also as a calling to all peoples actively support the self-determined food and cultural systems that support Indigenous food sovereignty. There is much work to do.

Fortunately, as Million (2013) has argued, culture is treatment, “a guard against trauma” (p.114).

Indigenous food sovereignty, as part of a living reality in which Indigenous peoples are actively working towards upholding their sacred and ancestral responsibilities to each other, the land, and all of Creation is culture in practice. If food is healer, and land is healer, and culture is healer, Indigenous food sovereignty can also be healing. Healing and liberation are closely intertwined.

On a personal level, I know this to be true.

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Appendix A: Script for Asking Participants In-Person or Via Phone

Hello x. How are you? As you are aware, I am working on my doctoral research on food in the Department of Social Work. I am asking for your permission to interview you as part of my research. I am interested in exploring the overlap between food and ceremony, and based on our relationship together, I think you would be a really good fit. I estimate this interview will take 1-2 hours although it may be longer if you have more to share. If you are interested, I would be pleased to share more details of my research and its process before we begin. (Explain consent form if agreed).

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form



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521 Tier Building
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Informed consent form (one-on-one Interview)

Study Title: Food as helper, food as healer: Traditional healing practices and Indigenous food sovereignty

Principal Investigator: Tabitha Robin Martens, PhD Candidate
Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba
(204) [REDACTED], Tabitha.Martens@umanitoba.ca

Research Advisor: Dr. Michael Hart, Adjunct Professor
University of Manitoba
(204) [REDACTED], Michael.Hart@umanitoba.ca

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

Participation is voluntary and declining to participate will have no negative impact on you.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to understand how Elders incorporate food in to their helping and healing practices.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to share your experiences in helping and healing practices. This includes the role of food in helping and healing practices. You will be encouraged to share your story and experiences in whatever manner is most comfortable for you. Throughout the interview, you will be encouraged to direct the discussion and provide information you feel is important to better understand your experiences.

With your consent, the interview will be audio recorded. If you do not consent to being recorded, I will take notes.

Depending on how much you wish to participate, the interview can take place over several sessions or in one session depending on what works best for you. At the end of each session you can indicate whether more time is needed and we can schedule another interview. Alternately, if after the session you feel you have more to share you can call me at 204- [REDACTED] or email me at Tabitha.Martens@umanitoba.ca in order to arrange another meeting.

OCAP

With your participation, we will follow the principles of Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP). These principles outline that

- you are the owners of the data produced through this study,
- you have control over how the data will be used,
- you can access the data that is in our possession

Benefits

This research is intended to have the overarching benefit of bringing awareness and attention to the role of food in helping and healing practices. This research is the first step towards supporting Indigenous people's self-determination by having your share with us appropriate healing and helping practices involving food so we may develop models of practice best suited to Indigenous peoples.

Comfort and Discomfort

While it is unlikely, the topics discussed in this project could create emotional distress for some people. In the event that you find any aspect of the study upsetting, during or after our conversations, we will provide you with contact information for relevant services, such as counseling services available in the community, or assist you to find an Elder with whom you can connect for support.

Confidentiality

Unless you indicate otherwise, your responses will be held as confidential. All digitally recorded interviews will be stored on a computer requiring a password for access to the files. The paper transcripts of the interviews will be stored in a locked cabinet at my home residence. All identifying information will be removed from the digital recording and paper transcripts and you will be assigned a pseudonym. The list of pseudonyms will be kept in a locked filing cabinet separate from the paper transcriptions. It will also be kept separate from the digital recording, electronic transcripts and consent forms. Unless otherwise directed by you, this identifying information and any confidential data will be stored for up to 5 years after the publication of the results. At any time and in line with OCAP, you can access the recorded material related to you, or request that any material related to you be destroyed. If you prefer that the material related to you be stored in another location of your choosing, we will follow your directions.

If you wish to be identified as a participant in this study and would like to have your responses noted as coming from you, then we will follow your preference. There is a place to identify your preference on this form.

Accuracy

You will be provided with a draft copy of the transcription, as well as our writings on the findings, to which you will be provided with the opportunity address each for accuracy. Changes can also be made by you to properly reflect your views. This can occur either through oral or written feedback by contacting me through telephone or email. Once you have had a week with the transcripts I will follow up through email or telephone call to ask about any changes.

Sharing the Results

Results from this study will be disseminated through presentations at scholarly conferences, workshops and through publication in academic journals and books. We will also share the results with any other individual(s) or groups you identify. At no time will we share any individual responses that could identify you as a participant unless you direct us to make your identity known. Prior to any publication we will confirm with you that the publication reflects your perspectives or includes your direct commentary if it does not.

Providing Consent

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

Honorarium

An honorarium of \$100 will be provided to thank you for your participation in this research project and to honour the Indigenous research ethic of reciprocity. It will be provided in the form of cash at the start of the interview. Even if you choose to withdraw from the study, the honorarium stays with you.

Quality Assurance

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Fort Garry Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122 or humanethics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Questions

If you have any questions about this research, feel free to phone or email me (see above). This research has been approved by the University of Manitoba Psychology/Sociology Research

Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact Dr. Michael Hart (listed above) or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122.

If you consent to participate, please sign on the following line or provide verbal consent at the beginning of the group sharing process.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher and/or Delegate's Signature

Date

Written Consent Verbal Consent

If you wish to be identified as a participant and have your responses attributed to you, please sign here or indicate this preference at the beginning of the interview. If this section remains blank and no verbal indications of your preference is given, then it will be understood that you wish your contributions to be anonymized.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher and/or Delegate's Signature

Copies of Reports:

Please check one of the following options:

I want to receive a hard copy of the final report mailed to me at the address below

I want to receive an electronic copy of the final report emailed to me at the address below

I do not want to receive any copy of the final report

Mailing Address:

Email Address:

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Thank you for agreeing to talk to me today about your experiences incorporating food into helping and healing practices. I'm honoured and grateful for your time and your sharing of knowledge with me.

- 1) I would like to begin by asking you to describe healing and helping practices that you have used or use in your work.
- 2) How do helping/healing practices involve food? Have you used food in your helping/healing work?
- 3) In ceremony, do you use or incorporate food? Can you describe or share with me?
- 4) Can you describe how traditional food practices have changed in your lifetime? (examples?)

Have you seen or experienced trauma as a result of these changes?
- 5) When you use food in your healing / helping work, how does this benefit your community?
- 6) In thinking about food and wellbeing, does food sovereignty play a role? Can you describe or share with me?
- 7) Is there anything you would like to add to this interview?