Indigenous Youth Experience with Helpers:
How They Help and How they Harm

by

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Abstract

This thesis presents qualitative interviews with eight Indigenous youth regarding their experiences of how helpers in their lives have helped them and how they have caused them harm. The central research questions focused on identity: how do you (youth participant) identify yourself, your family, your community, and your culture; and helpers: what are your experiences with helpers both non-Indigenous and Indigenous, and what are your ideas on what helpers should do differently to be more effective when helping Indigenous youth. The research was informed by anti-oppressive theory and Indigenous theories, the methodologies employed were Youth Participation Action Research and Indigenous research methodologies, and the data analysis was thematic. This thesis sheds light on how helpers can help Indigenous youth reconcile the colonial challenges that arise during adolescence when Indigenous youth start to form their identities. In order to be an effective helper with Indigenous youth helpers must consider how they can incorporate elements of Indigenous cultural values and activities within a trusting relationship.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Indigenous youth population in Canada is alive and growing. According to the 2016 Census from Statistics Canada the average age for Indigenous Canadians is 32.1 years while the average age for non-Indigenous Canadians is 40.9 years and the Indigenous population is growing four times faster than the non-Indigenous population (The Canadian Press, 2017). Despite a history of colonization and continued oppression, Indigenous peoples are resilient and continue to survive and thrive (Brooks, Daschuk, Poudrier, & Almond, 2015; Dumbrill & Green, 2008; Freeman, 2007).

However, Indigenous youth continue to experience problems in greater proportions than non-Indigenous youth. For example, child welfare involvement, poor housing, suicide rates, involvement in the criminal justice system, and alcohol and drug use are all higher in the Indigenous youth population (Brooks et al., 2015; McDowell, 2015). Sadly, the voices of Indigenous youth are consistently overlooked in the academic literature when it comes to finding solutions for these problems (Garrett, Parrish, Williams, Grayshield, Portman, Rivera, and Maynard, 2014; Goodluck, 2002; Spicer, LaFramboise, Markstrom, Niles, West, Fehringer, Grayson, and Sarche, 2012).

This research aims to combat the lack of Indigenous youth voices in literature by focusing on Indigenous youth’s experiences with helpers. Indigenous youth ages 18-24 from reserve communities and from urban centres participated in qualitative interviews which revealed ways that helpers have been helpful and ways that helpers have been harmful. At the core of the interviews was a focus on identity development and how the youth have developed resilient identities with the help of those around them even while needing to navigate a society
that does not always accept them. Stories of struggle, resilience, anger, and gratitude were shared as well as cautions and advice to the people who help or attempt to help Indigenous youth.

This introduction outlines my research objectives, explanation of terminology used throughout the thesis, my self-locating statement and personal reasons for engaging in the research, and a general map of the thesis.

**Research Objectives**

In Canada, many helpers serve Indigenous youth across various domains such as education, child welfare, and other youth-serving agencies. Many of the individuals employed by these agencies are non-Indigenous. The objective of this thesis is to explore Indigenous youths’ experiences of being served by non-Indigenous and Indigenous helpers, including what they have found to be helpful and not helpful or even harmful. Intricately related to the experience of being helped and/or needing help is the concept of identity, specifically resilient identity. In order to understand whether or not helpers have been helpful it is necessary to understand how Indigenous youth define themselves, the specific issues they face, and how they can come to be resilient or not.

The following points were the main research questions:

(1) How do you (youth participant) identify yourself, your family, your community, and your culture?

(2) What are your experiences with helpers both non-Indigenous and Indigenous?

(3) What are your ideas on what helpers should do differently to be more effective when helping Indigenous youth?
The research was informed by anti-oppressive theory and Indigenous theories, the methodologies employed were Youth Participation Action Research and Indigenous research methodologies, and the data analysis was thematic.

**Terminology**

The main terms requiring definition and explanation that are used throughout this thesis include Indigenous, helper, and youth. The term “Indigenous” is frequently used in order to refer to the youth that I interviewed as this term is considered to be the most respectful compared to other collective terms such as “Aboriginal”. Corntassel (2003), a scholar who has studied the term "Indigenous" defines it as a group of people who share a distinct nationhood, a connection with land, a struggle for self-determination, and a distinct set of cultures and traditions. The word “Indigenous” emphasizes the land origins (French, 2009) that many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people still resonate with and is devoid of the politics which surround the word “Aboriginal” (Joseph, 2016).

However, many authors caution that those working with Indigenous peoples should simply ask how the individual identifies and should use the term the individual uses (Freeman, 2007; Garrett et al., 2014; Joseph, 2007). Therefore, throughout this thesis especially within the direct quotations from the youth themselves, other terms that the youth used have remained. Terms such as Aboriginal, First Nation, Native, Anishinaabe, Métis, Nakota, and Neechi are ways that the youth identified their Indigeneity and have been included in this thesis. It is also important to note that while I did choose to use the term "Indigenous" throughout this thesis, it was not my intention to apply this research to all Indigenous peoples in Canada. There are many Indigenous tribes and nations within the country of Canada and I was only able to represent three of them- Anishinaabe, Oji-Cree, and Métis.
The term “helper” has been used throughout this thesis to refer to anyone who may provide help to an Indigenous youth. This person could be a social worker, teacher, medical professional, police officer, youth worker, etc. Lloyd and Mass (1993) outline the helping relationship and they state that the term “helper” denotes anyone a person may come to once they have exhausted their own resources. Thus, the term “helper” is broad in nature which is what I was hoping to achieve. I wanted to leave the definition of “helper” very open and wanted the youth to talk about anyone in their lives who may have helped them in a good way or who may have harmed them. The youth actually shared about guidance counsellors, teachers, mental health workers, counsellors, dentists, police officers, youth workers, child welfare workers, and nurses.

Finally, according to Riessman (1965), social worker and the father of “helper theory”, the term “helper” emphasizes a more equal relationship as opposed to terms such as service provider, therapist, professional. Anyone can be a helper and it is recognized that helpers often benefit from the altruistic feelings they gain from helping others (Riessman, 1965). Thus, the language I chose to use with the research participants I hope decreased the power differentials they may have been feeling and increased their trust which I hope ultimately led to richer accounts of the experience of being helped.

The term “youth” also requires definition and explanation. The research participants for this thesis were all 18-24 years old. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (1982), the definition of “youth” was expanded to include everyone under the age of 25 years as “youth” rather than only including those under the age of 18. Expanding the definition of “youth” acknowledges that much growth and identity development occurs between the ages of 18-24. It was my hope that the youth I interviewed
would be able to reflect on their experience of adolescence while still going through the process of "youth". This is why I chose to interview only those over the age of 18 but under the age of 25.

**Self-locating Statement**

Kovach (2009) believes that a self-locating statement is vital to include in Indigenous methodologies for a variety of reasons including clarification, theoretical consistency, and acknowledgement. An appropriate introduction clarifies who the researcher is without any judgment attached to it; it is a statement of personal truth. Self-locating statements also help put Indigenous methodology under the category of personal rather than substantive theory meaning the Indigenous researcher following this protocol of introduction recognizes that they are speaking for themselves and not on behalf of all Indigenous peoples (Kovach, 2009). Finally, the self-locating statement acknowledges the individual’s community and supporters, and affirms the knowledge gained from the collective as valid knowledge (Kovach, 2009).

Absolon and Willet (2005) also believe in the power of self-locating within Indigenous methodologies as they state it is the “most fundamental principle” (p. 97). Absolon and Willet (2005) discuss how self-locating can help with developing trust with research participants. Many Indigenous communities are justifiably suspicious of researchers and self-locating helps participants understand the researcher’s intention and builds “relatedness” (Absolon & Willet, 2005, p. 104). Absolon and Willet (2005) also outline clear guidelines regarding the elements a self-locating statement should include: the researcher’s relationship with everything from land and spirituality to individuals and community as well as the researcher’s intentions for the work. For my own self-locating statement I have chosen to follow these guidelines.

**Relationship to land and spirituality**
I must admit that I am conducting this research and writing this thesis during a particularly difficult period of my life. As I end my 20’s and begin to enter my 30’s with my two year old son by my side I often find myself feeling lost and unsure of how I should best move forward. Like the youth I interviewed, I find myself struggling with identity. I have found that what keeps me grounded, where I know I will always find peace is in the land.

My love of the land started when I was a young girl. My family and I would go camping at Spruce Woods Provincial Park in Manitoba, Canada every summer. My sister and I were allowed to explore and ride our bicycles through the forest. This annual trip was the highlight of my childhood. Now as an adult and a presenter for a program called “safeteen” (Roberts, 2001) it became the “safe place” I talk about with teenage girls. The program asks girls to find a safe place in which they can put their inner child when they are in dangerous situations. Spruce Woods campground is my safe place.

My love of the land continued to grow through my teenage years as I worked at a summer camp from the age of 15-22 every year. Camp was a spiritual place for me and was where I felt like my best self. Here I was able to bring young children to nature and to show them respect for the land. It was here also where I learned that I wanted to be a social worker in an attempt to make the world a better place for the most vulnerable children and youth that I served at camp. Spending sunny days by the lake, walking through the woods, staring up at the humongous cottonwoods, and spending nights sitting around the campfire taught me to find peace within myself.

When I started my Bachelor of Social Work degree in my early twenties I was finally exposed to some of the Indigenous teachings and beliefs surrounding land. I found myself drawn to these teachings and I found myself becoming angry when I heard how Indigenous peoples in
Canada are marginalized. I became particularly interested in how the disrespect for our earth can be directly correlated to the disrespect that we (Europeans) have shown Indigenous peoples. I started to participate in ceremonies such as powwows, feasts, sweats, and sundances.

In my Masters of Social Work program I decided I wanted to further expand this knowledge and connection and so for one of my elective courses I enrolled in a field study course which took my classmates and I on a ten-day experiential journey to a First Nations reserve in Ontario called Grassy Narrows. Here I was able to learn hands on land skills from an Anishinnabe elder, such as the importance of fishing, how to fillet and prepare a fresh fish, how to build a traditional log cabin, how to trap and hunt, and how to give thanks to the earth (creator) by offering tobacco. I was also able to participate in ceremonies at Grassy Narrows such as a sweat, naming ceremony, and a feast. After I left Grassy Narrows and had time to reflect upon my experience I realized that my relationship with land and with spirituality had deepened so much so that when I was late in my pregnancy I returned to Grassy Narrows and visited the elder who taught me how to collect and process wild rice in the traditional way.

Today as I navigate a tumultuous time in my life I know that when I leave the city that I live in, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, and return to the land outside of the city, I will find some sort of peace. As I nurture a young life I am acutely aware of the environments I bring him in. My son is Indigenous and it is important to me that he has opportunities to develop this part of his identity. His curiosity and questions about everything around him gives me a new appreciation and shows me things that I would have otherwise missed. He can spend 20 minutes just watching a ladybug crawl on a leaf. It is this simple beauty that feeds my soul. I had the privilege of bringing my little boy three times to a remote First Nations Manitoba reserve where I
interviewed half of the youth participants. Having him with me made me appreciate the beauty of
the land in this community even more so than had I gone alone.

Just as I learned how the disrespect of land directly correlates with the disrespect of
Indigenous peoples, my son is teaching me how the fragility of young lives also directly
correlates with the fragility of the earth. I have become even more concerned for the future of our
planet as I nurture this young boy and ever more grateful to the Indigenous activists who are
demanding that we all give the earth the respect it deserves. My relationship with land and
spirituality then, although something that grounds me, also gives me some anxiety. However, I
take comfort in the fact that regardless of what happens, when I see the stars up in the night sky I
know that there is something bigger than me out there.

**Relationship to Individuals and Community**

Within Indigenous methodologies it is important that the relationship between
participants/co-researchers and the principal researcher is already established (Barnett et al.,
2010; Weber-Pillwax, 2004) and McDowell (2015) states that a researcher working with
Indigenous youth should have a genuine interest in the research participants. I had a close
relationship with each person I interviewed prior to the interview. I also was able to develop a
relationship with three communities that the youth are most connected, (1) an isolated First
Nation community in Manitoba, Canada, (2) a small urban area with a high Indigenous
population in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, and (3) an accessible rural First Nation community
in Manitoba, Canada. This isolated First Nation community is accessible only by airplane for
most of the year and is accessible by a winter road for approximately 3 months of the year when
the lakes are frozen enough to drive on. It is surrounded by two other isolated communities
which are more easily accessed by boat during the warmer months or by winter road during the
cold season. Whereas the accessible rural First Nation community represented in this thesis is easily accessed by a well-maintained provincial highway all year round.

I became connected to youth from the isolated First Nation community while one of the research participants, Kira was attending high school and then college in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Kira and I developed a fast friendship—she was interested in my urban culture and I was interested in her Oji-Cree culture and life in her community. When she moved back to her home community we kept in touch online and when she came to visit Winnipeg she would stay at my home. She also connected me to many of her friends from her community. I became friends with Caprice, Asinnapis, and Jeff, who were some of the other research participants from this community, as well as many other community members. I was able to visit there for a week and participate in their annual community festival in the summer of 2016 which helped deepen my relationship with Kira, her family, and her community. I stayed with Kira and her family and got a taste of what life is like in an isolated First Nation community. In the spring of 2017 I was invited back to the community as a bridesmaid for my friend’s wedding and then in the summer of 2017 I again stayed with Kira for a visit and to conduct the interviews for this thesis.

I have also become connected to a small, urban, and primarily Indigenous community in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. My first position as a social worker was in this community as a community development social worker. I had the opportunity to work in a youth centre doing programming and counselling with the youth that would come. Two of the youth featured in this thesis, Shania and Martin were youth that came to the centre. These youth have now grown into young adults and have actually become my co-workers on occasion. Although I no longer work directly in this community I remain in the same agency nearby the community and would definitely consider myself connected to this community.
It was also through this work in this community that I became connected to Adriana who is considered to be a respected community member and advised me on this research. Adriana lived in this community and is now my friend and colleague with the position of “Indigenous Social Worker” in the agency where we both work. While I worked in this community I also became connected to a co-worker, friend, and research participant, Jasmine. For two summers Jasmine and I worked closely together helping youth prepare powwow regalia and organizing a community powwow. Jasmine and I stayed in touch after her work ended and she introduced me to an accessible rural First Nation community and her friend, Carson. With Jasmine to guide me I was able to participate in a full moon ceremony in this community as well as a sundance ceremony. Jasmine has been absolutely instrumental to me in teaching me cultural respect and how to convey that respect to the Indigenous children and youth that I work with.

**My Intentions for Research**

In Canada, many helpers serve Indigenous youth across various domains such as education, child welfare, and other youth-serving agencies. Many of the individuals employed by these agencies are non-Indigenous. Since I began practicing social work this underrepresentation of Indigenous workers is something I have always had an issue with. I wish to explore Indigenous youths’ experiences of being served by non-Indigenous helpers, including what they have found to be helpful and not helpful or even harmful and what their ideas for improvement are.

My goal is to explore how Canadian Indigenous youth view non-Indigenous helpers such as educators, social workers, and other youth workers. It is here that I want to name and acknowledge my own privilege as a white, middle-class, able-bodied, cis-gender woman conducting this research. This privilege is something that I have been aware of throughout the
research process and have made use of researcher reflexivity throughout as a way to keep my biases in check. An examination of researcher privilege is essential. According to Madden (2015), examining privilege prior to working with Indigenous peoples ensures that the researcher is disrupting rather than reinforcing colonial relationships. Dumbrill and Green (2008) state that if Eurocentric privilege is not checked it can make Eurocentrism seemingly neutral or invisible. They state that we need to acknowledge and examine privilege in order to see it and once we see it we need to be willing to give up the power it unjustly awards us.

Before I began this research I checked with the potential research participants as to whether or not my research question resonated with them. Everyone I contacted said that it was an important topic that needs to be discussed. One of the research participants, Jasmine, with tears in her eyes, said at the end of the research interview, “I think what you’re doing is really important. It really needs to be talked about more, I think. That’s why I was really open to the interview”. This research is dear to my heart and is something I hope to implement in my own work as a social worker. I am supremely grateful to the participants who have agreed to be in this research study.

**Map of Thesis**

Eight Indigenous youth were interviewed regarding their experiences of helpers, perceptions/constructions of identity, and hopes for the future. Their voices and stories of struggle, resiliency, anger, and gratitude are presented here. My aim in this thesis is to acknowledge and connect the issues and struggles that Indigenous youth face within the colonial context that has created a system of oppression. I believe this colonial, oppressive system has created many of the individual issues these youth described. Throughout this thesis these issues have been referred to as “colonial issues” (Dumbrill & Green, 2008, p. 631) rather than
“Indigenous issues” to highlight this point. Stories of resilience and strategies to build resilience have also been presented in this thesis.

In chapter two I present the relevant literature regarding the challenges Indigenous youth face, the problematic response of helpers, Indigenous youth perspective on helpers, and ways to challenge Eurocentrism and embrace Indigenous Knowledge. In chapter three I set up the theoretical framework which has informed my research process. Two theoretical areas, anti-oppressive theory and Indigenous theories, the assumptions which guide them and how they relate to my research are presented. Chapter four presents an overview of the study design including the methodologies (Youth Participation Action Research and Indigenous), means of data analysis, and the ethical challenges.

In chapter five and six I delve into the major findings from the qualitative interviews and an analysis of these findings. Themes of identity, helpful helpers, unhelpful helpers, and what helpers should do differently emerged. Chapter five focuses on the findings and highlights the voices of the participants in the study while chapter six focuses on an in-depth analytical discussion of these themes and how they can be applied to the helping relationship. I then conclude this thesis and synthesizes the research findings with the initial research question and also discusses the study limitations as well as opportunities for future research.
Chapter 2: Background and Literature Review—How Indigenous Youth & Their Helpers have been Represented in the Literature

I have made every effort to write this section with the emphasis on the failure of helpers and the systems they work in with the hope that the reader will understand that the reason so many Indigenous youth face more challenges and negative outcomes than their non-Indigenous peers is not due to their own personal failings, but is due to colonial structures. I will briefly outline these challenges and the outcomes and will then situate these challenges and outcomes in the colonial context responsible for them—in other words, the failure of systems to adequately meet the needs of Indigenous youth. This section will also outline the literature that exists in regards to Indigenous youth perspectives on non-Indigenous helpers as well as the work that needs to be done in challenging Eurocentrism and embracing Indigenous Knowledges.

Indigenous Youth Challenges and Outcomes

The Indigenous youth population in Canada is significant. According to McDowell (2015), Indigenous peoples have a 48% youth population compared to the 31% youth population for non-Indigenous Canadians. Indigenous youth face many significant barriers compared to non-Indigenous youth. For example, Indigenous youth experience disproportionately high rates of child welfare involvement, poverty, poor housing and homelessness, and inadequate living conditions (Brooks et al., 2015; McDowell, 2015). In terms of poverty, half of all Indigenous children in Canada live in poverty compared to 18% of non-Indigenous children (Statistics Canada, 2006). Suicide rates, involvement in the youth criminal justice system, as well as alcohol and drug use are all higher in the Indigenous youth population (Brooks et al., 2015).

McDowell (2015) terms an issue she calls “colonized parenting”, referring to the harmful effects colonization has had on parenting (p. 63). In recent history, many Indigenous children
have been raised outside their homes and many have not had good examples of parenting; this has contributed to colonized parenting—parents who have been unable to parent effectively due to a lack of positive parenting. These parents often produce youth with low self-esteem and little sense of identity. McDowell (2015) interviewed a reserve community member who stated in regards to the youth in her community: “These kids are just in survival mode everyday, just get through today, just get through today. You look at their parents, is it any wonder?” (p. 65).

Further, many Indigenous youth are parents themselves; 27% of Canadian First Nations children off-reserve under the age of six have mothers that are between the age of 15-24 (McDowell, 2015; NCPC, 2012). In order to serve Indigenous youth (especially those most vulnerable), many social service agencies and systems such as child welfare, education, and justice have responded through direct programming for Indigenous youth.

According to Baskin, Koleszar-Green, Hendry, Lavallee, and Murrin (2008), Indigenous people are overrepresented as service users, particularly within social work-related agencies. Moreover, staff members in these social service agencies are often non-Indigenous despite research claiming the benefits of Indigenous mentors for Indigenous youth (Mussell, Cardiff, & White, 2004). Brooks et al. (2015) state that the role of service providers, including social workers, is to bring marginalized voices to the forefront by “discovering ways to listen to youth who have been silenced” (p. 718).

The Literature on the Problematic Response of Non-Indigenous Helpers

According to many scholars (Dumbrill & Green, 2008; Garrett, Parrish, Williams, Grayshield, et al., 2014; Hare, 2011; Sarche & Whitesell, 2012; Stock & Grover, 2013), systems such as the education system and the child welfare system, along with other youth-serving systems, continue to fail Indigenous youth today.
Dumbrill and Green (2008) state that the education system was, and in many ways, remains a colonizing weapon of the state. They explain that historically the Canadian government used the education system to accomplish their goals of assimilation through the formation and implementation of residential schools. They contend this is still occurring through the normalization of Eurocentrism within the education system; a process which often seems invisible to those who have not gone through the hard work of examining their own privilege.

Anuik and Gillies (2012) also recognize that colonizing processes within the education system still exists and point out educators’ resistance to a mandatory “First Nations and Cross-Cultural Education” course in the Bachelor of Education program at the University of Saskatchewan as evidence of this. Carmen, a professor at the University of Saskatchewan who teaches this course states that resistance to anti-racist or anti-oppressive courses are often not well received by white students and that this resistance as well as ways to combat it are well documented by several scholars (LaDuke, 2009; Marx & Pennington, 2003; St. Denis & Schick, 2003, as cited in Anuik & Gillies, 2012).

The failure of educators to meet Indigenous youths’ needs begins in early school years, as noted by Hare (2011). Hare believes that Euro-Canadian educators did not learn and are often not aware of Indigenous culture and because of this they fail to make learning relevant for students. Hare (2011) reviewed an Indigenous-focused literacy program for early years students and found that the literacy rates for students improved when culture was incorporated into the curriculum. Comparatively little information about Indigenous history, tradition, and culture is taught in most Canadian school systems. Consequently, many Indigenous youth experience a lack of positive identity formation because their histories have been erased, misinterpreted/misrepresented or completely ignored in mainstream education (Stock & Grover, 2013).
Others have noted that many Indigenous youth must leave their communities if they are to continue their secondary school education, putting many of them at increased risk for negative outcomes including suicide (Talaga, 2016). In 2016 after seven Indigenous youth from Thunder Bay died after leaving their communities to attend high school an inquest was launched to uncover the reasons as to why Indigenous youth face such lethal outcomes (Talaga, 2016). Graduation rates for Indigenous youth continue to remain the lowest out of any identifiable group in Canada (Brooks et al., 2015). According to the 2006 Canadian census 34% of the Canadian Aboriginal population age 25-35 do not have a high school diploma compared to 15% of the non-Indigenous Canadian population (Canadian Council of Provincial Child and Youth Advocates, 2010). The 2016 Canadian census does show some improvements but there still remains a wide gap between Indigenous high school attainment and non—28.9% of Indigenous Canadians over the age of 25 did not have a high school diploma compared to 12.1% of the non-Indigenous Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2016). This body of literature suggests that Canadian educators are not meeting the unique needs of this population.

Social workers also have been criticized for failing Indigenous youth. Garrett et al. (2014) reviewed therapeutic interventions with Indigenous youth and found that “cultural ignorance on the part of the service provider is the number one reason for high treatment dropout rates and underutilization of help-seeking behaviours among Native people” (p. 481). Garrett et al. (2014) believe that social workers focus too much on “fixing” problems with Indigenous youth and that Indigenous youth needs would be better met if social workers gave more attention to holistic healing that incorporates culture and spirituality. Based on their research on child development in Indigenous communities, Sarche and Whitesell (2012), claim that social workers
fail Indigenous youth because there remains a lack of research and documentation of the mental health problems Indigenous youth face, as well as the services that are available to them.

The child welfare system, in particular, has been criticized for failing Indigenous youth. Recently researchers have termed the issue the “care to prison pipeline”, meaning Indigenous children who grow up in care overwhelmingly end up serving time in prison highlighting the dismal prospects for Indigenous youth who enter the foster care system (Cohen, 2016, p. 1). Pam Palmater, an Indigenous activist and lawyer called attention to this issue in 2017 in her McLean’s article entitled “Canada’s other tragic pipeline” (Palmater, 2017). However, even as early as 2000, Jonson-Reid & Barth (2000) were leading a discussion on the issue of foster children aging into the justice system as youth or young adults. Indigenous youth in care face homelessness, poverty, physical and sexual violence, substance abuse, and incarceration at alarming rates compared to their peers not in care (Cohen, 2016; Jonson-Reid & Barth, 2000; Navia, 2015; Palmater, 2017).

According to McDowell (2015), the failure of the education and child welfare systems to meet the needs of Indigenous youth stems directly from neo-colonial policies that serve to continue to oppress Indigenous peoples. McDowell (2015) found that youth are fearful in seeking the help of educators and social workers because these professionals have historically caused harm. One of the Indigenous community members who she interviewed had this to say in regards to helpers: “There has to be a great fear there, not only of the education system where they felt a lot of disempowerment was rooted, but also with the Child and Family Services, with Social Services, social workers. These institutions have created a lot of fear” (McDowell, 2015, p. 73).

Despite the issues in the education and child welfare systems, within the literature there
are some examples of improvements. For instance, according to Garrett et al. (2014), some mainstream schools have started to incorporate elements of Indigenous culture within curricula and are seeing highly efficacious results in terms of cultural preservation and reducing some problematic behaviours among youth. Spicer et al. (2012) discuss instances in which social workers have included input from Indigenous communities in their interventions and have seen improved relationships between youth and helpers as well as increased helper cultural competency. However, deep systemic change within these two systems is still needed to better meet the needs of Indigenous youth. Broadly speaking, it appears that these systems are currently not meeting their needs (Anuik & Gillies, 2012; Brooks et al., 2015; Cohen, 2016; Dumbrill & Green, 2008; Hare, 2011; McDowell, 2015; Sarche & Whitesell, 2012; and Stock & Grover, 2013).

The Literature on Indigenous Youth Perspectives of Non-Indigenous Helpers

Although it is recognized that Indigenous youth voices are marginalized voices that must be heard in order to better understand how helpers can plan interventions, we know very little about these voices in the academic literature. Garrett et al. (2014) acknowledge that, “native children and adolescents remain underrepresented in research” (p. 472). Spicer et al. (2012) also state that knowledge from Indigenous communities is the “least well articulated” (p. 49) in the literature out of any North American population; and Goodluck (2002) notes especially the lack of research on the strengths of Indigenous youth. Garrett et al. (2014) compiled a list of recommendations for helpers when they are working with Indigenous youth through a review of the literature; however, the list does not include actual youth voices. Rather, it includes expert opinion even though interventions have been shown to be more efficacious when Indigenous participation and culture are included (Brooks et al., 2015; Navia, 2015; Ross, 2005).
I was able to find a few examples of Indigenous youth voices in the literature. Abou, Abou, Andy, and Simpson (2015); Baskin (2007); and Navia (2015) have all brought the experiences of Indigenous youth in care to the forefront. The youth highlighted in these compilations spoke about their experiences with foster families, social workers, the system, and their hopes for the future.

Abou et al. (2015) and Navia (2015) both interviewed youth in care who spoke of their belief that their foster parents were only interested in fostering for the money. One youth interviewed stated that Indigenous youth are made "into sources of profit" (Navia, 2015, p. 58). Youth talked about how the foster families they were placed into were often white and they felt like the system was trying to "whitewash" them (Navia, 2015, p. 47). Many youth interviewed by both Baskin (2007) and Navia (2015) also spoke of foster care feeling like a jail and they felt that growing up on the street or being homeless was a better alternative as it increased their sense of control.

The Indigenous youth in the literature also revealed their perceptions of social workers within the child welfare system. One of the youth in Navia's (2015) study stated, "you don't talk to professionals" (p. 69) as they believed that any information provided to a child welfare worker would be used against them. Another Indigenous youth in Abou et al.'s (2015) interview talked about the relationship she had with social workers and stated that the relationships are too serious and that elements of fun and laughter would be more helpful.

The child welfare system or the state as a whole was another aspect that Indigenous youth in care had much to say about. Indigenous youth in Baskin's (2007) study and Navia's (2015) study spoke of the child welfare system's connection to the criminal justice system. They talked about how Indigenous children in child welfare grow up to be Indigenous youth involved in
criminal justice which is often a direct result of being homeless—a sentiment echoed by Cohen (2016) who termed this the "care to prison pipeline" (p. 1). Youth also spoke of police brutality and many youth stated that they saw the police as being abusive and perpetuating colonial violence (Baskin, 2007; Navia, 2015). Homeless Indigenous youth in Baskin's (2007) study stated that when they did decide to get help they were much more comfortable approaching agencies that looked Indigenous on the outside (had Indigenous art or colours, for example) and they believe that the system as a whole needs to be more approachable to Indigenous youth.

The Indigenous youth in these examples spoke of the importance of reconnecting to culture and land as key to improving outcomes and a sense of identity (Abou et al., 2015; Baskin, 2007; Navia, 2015). Many of the youth also spoke about being advocates for future generations and talked about specific ways that the child welfare system could improve. For instance, one of the youth in Baskin's (2007) study talked about child welfare workers needing to differentiate between neglect and poverty when deciding whether or not to apprehend and that increasing supports for families rather than apprehending may be a more appropriate form of intervention.

These interviews with Indigenous youth in care were insightful and promising; however, I could not find any research that had been done with Indigenous youth who grew up with their families of origin or on reserve which I believe is a significant gap as the issues on reserve are well documented and Indigenous youth within their families of origin presumably also receive help from non-Indigenous helpers. The interviewed youth also did not specifically relay their experiences with service providers. The literature that represents Indigenous youth voices in regards to helpers is a significant research gap and one that I wish to address. The remainder of this literature review will focus on the research that does exist in relation to working with Indigenous youth.
The Literature on Challenging Eurocentrism and Embracing Indigenous Ways of Understanding & Healing

Most of the relevant research that has been done in regards to what is helpful for Indigenous youth can be grouped into two major themes: (1) the importance of challenging non-Indigenous cultures (Eurocentrism) as it exists in institutions such as education, social work, and research itself; and (2) embracing Indigenous ways of understanding and healing.

The importance of challenging non-Indigenous culture—decolonizing.

It is clear from the research that the issues many Indigenous youth face cannot be solved by the colonial, oppressive system that caused the intergenerational effects of colonization (Baskin et al., 2008; Dumbrill & Green, 2008; Freeman, 2007; Stock & Grover, 2013). According to Brooks et al. (2015), youth crime is a symptom of “social harm” (Kumsa, Ng, Chambon, Maiter, & Yan, 2013, p. 847) in Indigenous communities and is a direct result of a lack of positive historical identity. Fortunately, Indigenous cultures are resilient and despite hundreds of years of colonization, have survived and are useful when it comes to solving the problems that face Indigenous youth today (Brooks et al., 2015; Dumbrill & Green, 2008; Freeman, 2007).

However, in order to access this breadth of Indigenous knowledge, it is necessary to first challenge cognitive/cultural imperialism by decolonizing the social service system and the education system (Anuik & Gillies, 2012; Kendall, Sunderland, Barnett, Nalder, & Matthews, 2011; Madden, 2015; Stock & Grover, 2013). Stock and Grover (2013) further this idea in their assertion that the source of the issue is the colonial system itself rather than the Indigenous system. They believe that non-Indigenous helpers need to shift away from representing the problems many Indigenous peoples face as “Indigenous issues” and instead construct these
problems as “colonial issues” (p. 631). Dumbrill and Green (2008) believe that the issues cannot be solved simply by including Indigenous Knowledges in places where it has traditionally been excluded such as the academy, but rather the dominant Eurocentric culture needs a complete disruption so that Indigenous Knowledges not only has a place but actually changes the way knowledge is understood. Hart (2010) also believes that challenging the mainstream idea that positions Indigenous Knowledges or ways of healing as secondary practices needs to happen within helping fields and that Indigenous Knowledges or ways of healing must be approached from an Indigenous lens rather than a Western one.

Three areas of the academy and social service system are given particular attention in the literature: the education system, social work, and Indigenous research. The education system is a colonial system (Dumbrill & Green, 2008; Stock & Grover, 2013). Dumbrill and Green (2008) point out that after military domination, the first weapon of the colonizer was the education system, particularly the residential school system. It forced Indigenous children and youth to leave their families and traditions causing a cultural genocide. Stock and Grover (2013) assert that even today school curricula and non-Indigenous teachers tend to erase the histories of marginalized youth, such as Indigenous youth, thus contributing to their loss of identity.

Madden (2015) argues that there must be changes to the education system that support the needs of Indigenous students and believes that a system grounded in the “4 R’s”: respect, relevancy, reciprocity, and responsibility can help accomplish this change (p. 1). Kirkness and Barnhardt (2001) initiated this concept of the 4 R’s as it reflects the unique needs and values of Indigenous students. For instance, Indigenous students, especially university students are often looking to advance the collective Indigenous society to become more self-determining whereas non-Indigenous students usually attend university to advance themselves as individuals.
There is also recognition that it is impossible for non-Indigenous teachers who support Indigenous youth to be neutral (Madden, 2015; Stock & Grover, 2013). Stock and Grover (2013) state that it is necessary for every educator to go through a process of critical self-reflection so that they can arrive at their own anti-racist teaching pedagogy. Madden (2015) believes that non-Indigenous teachers must challenge their own misconceptions they may have surrounding Indigenous students, especially the misconception that Indigenous students and communities do not value education. Madden (2015) states that these misconceptions are a result of a mismatch between Indigenous and Eurocentric worldviews.

Some of these issues can be addressed by changing the way teachers receive their education degree, in other words by changing policy and structure. For example, some universities such as the University of Manitoba, University of Victoria and the University of Winnipeg now require education students to take an Indigenous pedagogy course prior to graduation (Lee, 2016; Madden, 2015). While Dumbrill and Green (2008) advocate for a complete overhaul of Eurocentric pedagogy within the academy in order to make room for Indigenous Knowledges, Anuik and Gillies (2012) caution that when Indigenous Knowledges are included in the education curricula it is important to keep certain principles such as holism (spirit, heart, mind, and body), creation, the belief of a higher purpose, and spirituality in mind.

Indigenous youth also interact with non-Indigenous social workers quite frequently—“Aboriginal people are overrepresented as service users of social work” (Baskin et al., 2008, p. 91). According to the literature (Dumbrill & Green, 2008; Johnston-Goodstar, 2013), the social work profession also requires an overhaul in order to properly meet the needs of Indigenous youth. Historically child welfare workers had a large role to play in colonization through actions such as the “60’s scoop” in which an estimated 20,000 (CTV Television, 2017) children were
removed from their homes and placed into alternative care such as non-Indigenous foster homes or facilities during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s (Johnston-Goodstar, 2013).

However, colonization within the child welfare system is not over according to Johnston-Goodstar (2013) who states that as long as social work continues to solely use Eurocentric theories to inform the profession, social workers will simply be continuing the pattern of oppression. Johnston-Goodstar (2013) calls for social work education to adapt new theories that have roots in “Indigenous Social Justice Theorization” (p. 316). A central tenet in Indigenous Social Justice Theorization is the concept of Indigenous sovereignty, meaning Indigenous peoples have the right to their own culture, language, spirituality, land, water, natural resources, and government (Johnston-Goodstar, 2013).

Dumbrill and Green (2008) agree that without a system-overhaul, non-Indigenous social workers will continue to perpetuate oppression. They also state that it is necessary for the social work academy to examine how it is dominated by European knowledge before simply including aspects of Indigenous Knowledges. As an example, Dumbrill and Green (2008) advocate for the usage of the medicine wheel in order to “reconceptualize Indigenous space and challenge the dominant European ideology” (p. 497). The new Master of Social Work Indigenous Knowledges program at the University of Manitoba aims to address some of the issues that have traditionally existed in the social work academy by embedding Indigenous Knowledge and culture throughout the entire curricula and even includes Indigenous Elders as instructors of some of the classes (University of Manitoba, 2016).

Finally, the way research is conducted on/with Indigenous peoples must be reformed in order for non-Indigenous peoples to best serve communities and individual Indigenous youth. According to Australian scholar, Dodson (1994, p. 3), “colonizing cultures have [always] had a
preoccupation with observing, analyzing, studying, classifying, and labeling Aboriginies and Aboriginality” (as cited in Kendall et al., 2011, p. 1720) and one could easily make the same argument for the situation of Indigenous research in Canada as well. Research written from the point of view of Eurocentric or Western knowledge has produced a proliferation of damage-centred or deficiency-based findings in regards to Indigenous youth (Johnston-Goodstar, 2013; Kendall et al., 2011; Madden, 2015).

In order to combat the issue of damage-centred and deficiency-based literature advocates are urging researchers to use alternative methodologies and epistemologies when working with Indigenous youth, which include resilience research (Brooks et al., 2015), Indigenist research (Kendall et al., 2011), and Youth Participation Action Research (YPAR) (Johnston-Goodstar, 2013; Kumsa et al., 2013). These methods all emphasize community or individual ownership and control over data, high involvement in the entire research process, and techniques such as storytelling and relationship-building. In addition, Brooks et al. (2015) and Stock and Grover (2013) stress the importance of author reflexivity in the research process particularly for non-Indigenous researchers. Researchers must position or situate their own self in the research by offering their background story and naming their privilege.

**Embracing Indigenous ways of understanding and healing.**

According to Brooks et al. (2015) research shows that there is a direct connection between spirituality and culture in fostering Indigenous youth resilience. McDowell (2015) and Skwarok (2013) also note that Indigenous youth who connect with their culture develop pride in their identity. Once Eurocentric culture is challenged Indigenous Knowledges can start to be embraced in the social service realm, which can help initiate Indigenous youth healing and resilience (Dumbrill & Green, 2008). Two major themes appear frequently in the literature in
regards to this: (1) the importance of Indigenous knowledges and cultures and (2) the importance of recognizing Indigenous land ownership and how it connects to resilient identity formation.

Dumbrill and Green (2008) define Indigenous Knowledges as “the traditional ways of knowing and being Aboriginal peoples” (p. 489). Hart (2010) cautions against defining Indigenous Knowledges and believes that the process of understanding Indigenous Knowledge is a more appropriate emphasis. Many researchers have stressed the importance of using Indigenous Knowledge with Indigenous youth (Anuik & Gillies, 2012; Brooks et al., 2015; Dumbrill & Green, 2008; Freeman, 2007; Johnston-Goodstar, 2013; Stock & Grover, 2013). Freeman (2007) states that cultural practices are needed in order to heal intergenerational trauma and believes that all social workers should integrate these practices into their work. Cultural practices such as storytelling, relationship-building, and emotional reasoning are key to fostering Indigenous youth resilience (Anuik & Gillies, 2012; Dumbrill & Green, 2008; Freeman, 2007).

Storytelling and relationship-building are intricately connected. According to Freeman (2007), “storytelling establishes and maintains human relationships as well as offering hope, strength, and vision” (p. 101). Anuik and Gillies (2012) also stress the ability of stories to foster empathy and connectedness between youth and service providers. Dumbrill and Green (2008) discuss ideas on how non-Indigenous service providers can build relationships with Indigenous individuals and they encourage non-Indigenous helpers to engage by attending community events and meetings while also being aware of privilege including what can be perceived as cultural appropriation or voyeurism. It is imperative that non-Indigenous helpers build authentic relationships with Indigenous youth and move beyond tokenistic relationships. For instance, Madden (2015) cautions that while developing empathy for Indigenous youth is important, it can
also have the effect of creating “victims” and “rescuers” (p. 9). In order to best develop relationships with Indigenous youth it is vital that non-Indigenous helpers engage in decolonizing work so that they can be open to cultural practices such as story-telling and authentic relationship-building.

Emotional or “heart” reasoning is another Indigenous practice that non-Indigenous helpers should pay attention to (Anuiak & Gillies, 2012; Dumbrill & Green, 2008). While Eurocentric epistemologies prioritize neutrality and evidence-based knowledge, Indigenous Knowledges recognize that which can only be fueled by the heart as truth (Anuiak & Gillies, 2012; Dumbrill & Green, 2008). Dumbrill and Green (2008) state that when non-Indigenous helpers are engaging in a process of decolonization, a final step should be to “connect the knowledge entering their heads to the feelings in their heart” (p. 501); and Anuiik and Gillies (2012) agree that once a non-Indigenous helper is open to the feelings in their heart they can overcome some of the fear that they may have developed in regards to including Indigenous Knowledge while still needing to engage in a process of critical self-reflection. When non-Indigenous helpers connect with Indigenous youth emotions and heart knowledge must be present—as Kumsa et al. (2013) state, healing is a relational process that cannot be devoid of feelings.

Non-Indigenous helpers must also recognize the strong connection that many Indigenous youth have to their land and how this connection to the land directly informs many of their identities (Baskin et al., 2008; Freeman, 2007; Johnston-Goodstar, 2013; Stock & Grover, 2013). Freeman (2007) recognizes the ultimate importance Indigenous peoples place on land-based identities as her research reveals that in every type of Indigenous language “the words used to describe Indigenous peoples acknowledge the connection of the people to the land they live
upon” (p. 96). Baskin et al. (2008) believe that all helpers providing service to Indigenous individuals must start with identity reconstruction based on land connection, in other words helping youth to reconnect with their homelands, since this was precisely what settlers attempted to demolish through colonization. Stock and Grover (2013) agree that the problems Indigenous youth experience are different from the issues that other marginalized youth experience “due to the relationship ‘Indigenous issues’ have to land ownership, displacement, and sovereignty” (p. 631).

Brooks et al. (2015) in their study found that it was imperative for marginalized Indigenous youth to develop a resilient identity in order to heal from the intergenerational trauma they have experienced and while the importance of land connection cannot be understated, it is also necessary to recognize that youth live in “multifarious worlds” (p. 715) meaning many Indigenous youth must reconcile a tribal as well as a mainstream youth identity. While Indigenous Knowledges, culture, and land ownership are proven pathways to resilience, a key component to producing resilient Indigenous youth identities is for the youth to have the opportunity to locate themselves (Brooks et al., 2015). Subedi and Daza (2008) describe a concept they term “discrepant identities” (p. 5). They recognize that while many marginalized youth have a cultural component to their identity they also carry aspects of the dominant culture and that these identities are not dichotomous but are “overlapping and interconnected” (p. 6). Johnston-Goodstar (2013) states that youth must have the opportunity to construct their own identity and have direct control over how their reality and potential is described. Non-Indigenous helpers can guide Indigenous youth towards resilient identities and can use land as a positive way to reconnect youth to their cultures while bearing in mind that this may not be the only aspect of identity that youth resonate with.
While non-Indigenous helpers may find that youth have developed discrepant identities (Subedi & Daza, 2008) from living in multifarious worlds (Brooks et al., 2015) it is still the responsibility of the non-Indigenous helper to decolonize themselves, a huge process which involves, a repatriation of Indigenous land (Madden, 2015). To accomplish this Johnston-Goodstar (2013) advocates for the formation of Indigenous Land Warriors—in other words, Indigenous youth committed to resurgence moving away from the typical definition of militaristic warriors. Both Johnston-Goodstar (2013) and Madden (2015) stress education of practitioner and of Indigenous youth as a means of accomplishing this feat—“to confront the state without an education today would be like going into battle against the Calvary without bows and arrows” (Alfred, 1999, p. 133 as cited in Johnston-Goodstar, 2013, p. 317).

Relevant research has shown the importance of challenging Eurocentric culture and embracing Indigenous ways of knowing and understanding when non-Indigenous helpers work with Indigenous youth. However, as was already stated, research that presents a youth point of view is still lacking and it is this gap, which I hope to address.
Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework—Anti-oppressive Theory & Indigenous Theories

Two bodies of theory make up my theoretical framework and inform my research on bringing Indigenous youth voices regarding non-Indigenous service providers to the forefront: Anti-oppressive theory with roots in structural social work, critical thought, and post-modernism; and Indigenous theories.

Anti-oppressive Theory

Anti-oppressive theory primarily seeks to dismantle oppression and is an orientation often used in social work (Baines, 2007). Anti-oppressive theory has roots in structural social work (Baines, 2007). According to Mullaly (2007), structural social work is part of critical theory, which explicitly calls for the emancipation of oppressed individuals and a critique of dominant Eurocentric ideas. Moosa-Mitha (2005) also stresses the importance of emancipation and liberation within anti-oppressive theory. Moosa-Mitha (2005) states that anti-oppressive theory’s distinguishing feature is the combination of difference-centred and critical orientations. For instance, many of the theories that inform anti-oppressive theory such as post-modernism emphasize difference but are lacking in a critical, intersectional analysis (Moosa-Mitha, 2005). Other theories such as Marxist or feminist theories (prior to their evolution) focus on a critical analysis but are lacking a difference-centred (i.e., a recognition of the existence of multiple truths and/or realities) approach (Moosa-Mitha, 2005; Potts & Brown, 2005). Moosa-Mitha (2005) states that because of this unique combination of difference-centred and critical lenses, anti-oppressive theory moves beyond many liberal theories.

Potts and Brown (2005) outline three tenets for anti-oppressive theory when used in research: (1) there must be an emphasis on social justice and resistance; (2) there must be a recognition that all knowledge is socially constructed; and (3) power imbalances and
relationships must be attended to. Moosa-Mitha (2005), Potts and Brown (2005), and Stock and Grover (2013) believe that anti-oppressive theory can be useful when challenging Eurocentric domination and Stock and Grover (2013) claim that it shifts “focus from where oppression originates over to where it is expressed” (p. 631). In other words, there is a recognition that oppression does not originate with the oppressed but with the oppressors. In the case of my research area, the focus shifts to the colonial system rather than on the Indigenous communities and/or Indigenous youth—colonial issues rather than Indigenous issues (Dumbrill & Green, 2008).

Anti-oppressive theory also has roots in post-modernism as it recognizes power imbalances as well as affirms the idea of pluralism or multiple truths (Baines, 2007). Nissen and Curry-Stevens (2012) state that anti-oppressive theory helps to balance power dynamics by addressing the power process from a micro to macro level; and Baines (2007) discusses how these underlying power relations must be explored when discovering the “truth”. The recognition that truth is a social construct is a central tenet of anti-oppressive theory (Baines, 2007; Moosa-Mitha, 2005; Potts & Brown, 2005).

Anti-oppressive theory is also useful for conceptualizing my research as it is congruent with many of the practices such as identifying privilege and emphasizing the importance of stories and relationship-building that the literature emphasizes as important when working with Indigenous youth. Indeed, Freeman (2007) states that anti-oppressive perspectives can actually reduce colonial oppression and can “restructure our society to honour and acknowledge Native people” (p. 98). Baines (2007) believes that anti-oppressive theory can be used as a tool to understand where on the “privilege-oppressed” continuum a researcher may stand, which is
useful for the researcher reflexivity necessary when engaging in Indigenous research (Brooks et al., 2015; Stock & Grover, 2013).

Potts and Brown (2005) also emphasize researcher reflexivity when using anti-oppressive theory. According to them, “for white, middle-class, able-bodied, heterosexual people, this is our most important work in anti-oppressive practice—recognizing our own privilege” (p. 258). This quote resonates with me strongly, as I am a white, middle-class, able-bodied, cis-gender woman of privilege. I used anti-oppressive theory to help locate myself within my research, one of the most fundamental practices of Indigenous methodology (Absolon & Willett, 2005).

As I discovered from a review of the literature, story-telling and relationship-building are two practices that are central to Indigenous Knowledge and are helpful when working with Indigenous youth (Anuik & Gillies, 2012; Dumbrill & Green, 2008; Freeman, 2007). Anti-oppressive theory also highlights these concepts and is, therefore, a useful theory for understanding the qualitative data from the interviews. For instance, Baines (2007) discusses that when researchers operate from an anti-oppressive perspective, the stories individuals tell must be “unpacked and re-storied in order to reveal oppressive storylines, hidden strengths and resistance” (p. 25). Baines believes that when researchers fail to engage in this process it can perpetuate colonialism. Relationships, particularly relationships between helpers and clients, are also given special attention in anti-oppressive theory. Nissen and Curry-Stevens (2012) state the goal of such relationships should be working towards social justice and advocates for a “liberatory framework” of equity and freedom to accomplish this (p. 408). This liberatory framework emphasizes the power differentials between helpers and those seeking help and works to diminish them.
Anti-oppressive theory also lends itself nicely to the specific research methodologies I used to conduct my research, notably Youth Participation Action Research (YPAR) and Indigenous methodologies. Brooks et al. (2015) and Stock and Grover (2013) discuss how YPAR is firmly rooted in anti-oppressive ways of understanding and anti-oppressive action. Baines (2007) also states that anti-oppressive theory helps to move research beyond critique and into action—a central tenet of YPAR. Moosa-Mitha (2005) terms this movement of research into action, “praxis” and states that anti-oppressive theory can help researchers find this link between knowing and doing (p. 67).

Potts and Brown (2005) believe that anti-oppressive theory aligns with Indigenous methodology and they point to the principles of Indigenous methodology outlined by Weber-Pillwax (1999) to demonstrate this. Potts and Brown (2005) state that principles such as interconnectedness, an emphasis on subjective experience, and a movement towards social justice are consistent with anti-oppressive theory. However, Baines (2007) acknowledges that a significant gap in anti-oppressive perspective is “the role for Indigenous knowledge and practice” (p. 25). Absolon and Willett (2005) also note that while anti-oppressive theory is useful, it still does not explicitly embrace Indigenous ways of understanding. Both research methodologies (YPAR and Indigenous methodology) are discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

**Indigenous Theories**

My research was informed by Indigenous theories. According to Robbins, Chatterjee, and Canda (2006) theories in social work are used to explain and predict human behaviour and are used as guidelines for social action including research. Robbins et al. (2006) also point out that each theory is often an extension of the theorist’s own worldview reflecting the theorist’s own
values. Smith (2005) states that there is no single Indigenous theory but that there are Indigenous theories. For instance, Hart (2002) presented an Indigenous approach to social work based on the medicine wheel concept and in later work Hart (2010) outlines a Cree worldview or theory while Simpson (2011) outlines a Nishnaabeg theory. Each theory is distinct but also shares overarching themes that could point to an Indigenous theory. Kovach (2009) acknowledges that theories in general encompass privileged knowledge and believes that scholars engaging in research with Indigenous peoples should come from an Indigenous theoretical stance.

Despite these important reasons for having an Indigenous theory, Hart (2010) and Smith (2005) caution against defining an Indigenous theory especially if the definition stems from Eurocentric principles. Hart (2010) believes that the process of understanding Indigenous worldviews and knowledges are more important than pinpointing a definition. However, Smith (2005) acknowledges the difficulty in avoiding Eurocentric definition and states that Indigenous researchers are in an exceptionally tough situation often needing to be “doubly accountable” (p. 9) to both the academy as well as various Indigenous communities.

Kovach (2009) and Simpson (2011) both state the important impact that Western critical theory has had on decolonizing Indigenous thought but both also advocate for an Indigenous theory in addition to critical theory. These somewhat conflicting viewpoints—using Indigenous theory with Eurocentric parameters or forgoing Indigenous theory altogether based on lack of a singular defining theory prompted me to question whether or not to use an Indigenous theory for my own research. When I was researching Indigenous theories I also realized that it was necessary for me to acknowledge that I am not Indigenous and that I do not have values from a particular community with which to draw from and therefore my analysis of the data was based on a Euro-centric perspective. Weber-Pillwax (2004) states that this complexity in navigating
between community cultural values and beliefs and selecting a research method can be extremely challenging for any researcher but is especially challenging when one does not have a specific community with which to draw on. However, I did not believe that I could conduct this research by simply using a critical or anti-oppressive theoretical lens and even though I am a white researcher, the nature of the research I wished to conduct demanded that I also consider Indigenous theories.

This complexity of whether or not to define an Indigenous theory must be acknowledged and the issues with using Eurocentric language to define Indigenous theory must also be acknowledged (Hart, 2010). I became hopeful about using an Indigenous theoretical stance to frame my research from Simpson’s (2011) assertion that Indigenous tools rather than Western tools are needed to re-build Indigenous resiliency. She uses the analogy of a house: “I am not so concerned with how we dismantle the master’s house, that is, which set of theories we use to critique colonialism; but I am very concerned with how we [Indigenous peoples] (re)build our own house” (Simpson, 2011, p. 32). I believe that I must use an Indigenous theoretical stance to inform my research to be as respectful of Indigenous cultural resurgence as I can be while being mindful of my own privilege as well as the risk of cultural appropriation.

By reading through many Indigenous scholars’ accounts (Hart, 2002, 2010; Kovach, 2009; Simpson, 2011; Smith, 2005; Weber-Pillwax, 2004), I was able to understand what can be accomplished by using an Indigenous theory. According to Simpson (2011), “ultimately Indigenous theory seeks to dismantle colonialism while simultaneously building a renaissance of mino-bimadiziwin” (p. 31). Mino-bimaadiziwin (Simpson, 2011) or mino-pimatisiwin (Hart, 2002) are Anishnaabe and Cree words that translate into “the good life”. Rowe (2014) believes that mino-pimatisiwin can directly inform Indigenous theory and methodology since it is here
that the protocol for right relationships extends. This is my starting point for realizing an Indigenous theory along with creation stories and the relationship Indigenous peoples have with the land, which Simpson (2011) believes is the Indigenous theoretical framework.

Many of the above mentioned authors have outlined various defining features that shape Indigenous theory that I adopted for my research. Kovach (2009) and Smith (2005) focus on the critical elements of Indigenous theory. They state that Indigenous theory is transformative in that it criticizes colonialism and it is flexible enough to be adapted to local populations (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2005). They both also believe that Indigenous theory is cultural and community-oriented and they advocate for a theory that is relatable and in language that is easy to understand.

Hart (2002, 2010) outlines the conditions necessary for an Indigenous approach to social work and then outlines the principles of Indigenous worldviews. While neither of these are explicitly named as “Indigenous theory” both follow the definition of what a theory is according to Robbins et al. (2006): they explain and predict human behaviour and are an extension of the theorist’s (Hart’s) worldview. Hart’s (2002, 2010) descriptive features include concepts and principles such as holistic and relational knowledge; balance and harmony with an acknowledgement that everything is alive and everything is equal; a recognition of the sacredness of land; and an emphasis on spirituality and the growing and healing journey of humans.

Themes of relationship including the relationship Indigenous peoples have with the land and an emphasis on spirituality were consistently highlighted in all the works I read regarding Indigenous theories. Simpson (2011) states that three conditions must be met for a theory to be Indigenous: (1) there must be an emphasis on spirituality, (2) colonialism must be critiqued, and
(3) Storytelling with particular attention given to creation stories is how the theory is to be accessed. Using these conditions as well as the other outlined defining features (Hart, 2002, 2010; Kovach, 2009; and Smith, 2005) have helped shape my research.

I believe that the defining features of Indigenous theory as I see it framed my research in a good way. My goal was to access the knowledge in the existing relationships I have with youth from various Indigenous communities around the helping relationships that they have experienced. Freeman (2007) and Hart (2002) both make reference to the strong value many Indigenous communities place on child or youth-centred sacred knowledge. Garrett et al. (2014) talk about how this belief in the sacredness of children and youth is often a starting point for an entire community to return to health. Hart (2002) also discusses how Indigenous theory emphasizes the helping relationship and that tools of story-telling and humour are paramount in being a culturally respectful helper. I believe that these elements of Indigenous theory in particular helped me develop my research methodology, as well as my research design and analysis.
Chapter 4: Methodology & Study Design

Research Methodology

I chose two research methodologies to carry out this research, and notably, both align with my theoretical framework (i.e., anti-oppressive theory and Indigenous theories): (1) Youth Participation Action Research (YPAR), and (2) Indigenous methodologies.

Youth Participation Action Research (YPAR)

According to Kendall et al. (2011), Participation Action Research (PAR) operates under four major tenets: participation, learning, empowerment, and social action with the largest emphasis on the participation tenet. When a researcher chooses a PAR methodology, the researcher is aware that the roles between participant and researcher will be intentionally blurred (London, 2007; Kendall et al., 2011)—local knowledge becomes scientific knowledge and objectivity of the researcher is not possible (London, 2007). In addition to this, social action—actual improvement in participants’ lives rather than simply “research” is key to a PAR methodology (London, 2007; Kendall et al., 2011).

YPAR operates under the same principles but with some inherent assumptions regarding the nature of “youth”. For instance, Johnston-Goodstar (2013) states that YPAR recognizes that youth within the larger society are socially constructed and this social construction often does not match the youth’s own view of self. Johnston-Goodstar (2013) believes that YPAR is an effective method for providing engagement opportunities in which youth can contest this incongruent social construction as well as the misuse of power in their lives. Cerecer, Cahill, and Bradley (2013) assume that youth are “active contributing members of society” (p. 217) and they discuss how critical youth studies along with YPAR can be useful in making positive changes in communities that include young people. London (2007) recognizes that youth participants in a
YPAR study have the opportunity to make their visions and dreams a reality as it gives them a voice in a world in which they are often rendered voiceless.

Many scholars (Brooks et al., 2015; Cerecer et al., 2013; Johnston-Goodstar, 2013; Kendall et al., 2011; Watter, Fanous, and Berliner, 2012) have suggested YPAR to be a useful methodology when doing research with Indigenous youth. However, these same scholars also advocate for specific theoretical stances such as anti-oppressive (Brooks et al., 2015), critical youth theory (Cerecer et al., 2013), and Indigenous social justice theories (Johnston-Goodstar, 2013; Kendall et al., 2011) to be used in conjunction with YPAR. “If YPAR is done in a collaborative, culturally reflective ways…and is guided by Indigenous social justice theories, it is a fitting method for working with Indigenous youths” (Johnston-Goodstar, 2013, p. 318). YPAR has proven to be an appropriate methodology for working with oppressed populations (Cerecer et al., 2013; Kendall et al., 2011) and it is for this reason that I chose to include it in my research project.

However, Watter et al. (2012) discuss the limits of YPAR with Indigenous youth citing issues such as cultural values of quietness and non-confrontation or modesty as barriers to sharing stories especially in group settings. Watter et al. (2012) outline various strategies researchers can use to combat these potential issues such as hiring research assistants from the community, providing opportunities for one-to-one interviews rather than just using focus groups, and providing multiple means of communication such as writing and art rather than relying solely on conversation. I believe that there are many merits to YPAR; however, since my study was not simply with youth participants but with Indigenous youth participants, Indigenous methodologies were also essential.

**Indigenous Methodologies**
Kovach (2009) has completed extensive work on Indigenous methodologies; she outlines three key aspects of Indigenous methodologies including: (1) a self-location statement; (2) a grounding of methodologies in Indigenous knowledge, epistemology, and philosophy; and (3) a contextual statement that acknowledges all research is political. Kovach (2009) believes that Indigenous methodologies are important and distinct because of their unique offerings of kindness, gentleness, sustainability, and relationality. I adopted Kovach’s (2009) approach to Indigenous research.

Kovach (2009) believes that a self-locating statement is vital to include in Indigenous methodologies for a variety of reasons including clarification, theoretical consistency, and acknowledgement. An appropriate introduction clarifies who the researcher is without any judgment attached to it; it is a statement of personal truth. Self-locating statements also help put Indigenous methodology under the category of personal rather than substantive theory meaning the Indigenous researcher following this protocol of introduction recognizes that they are speaking for themselves and not on behalf of all Indigenous peoples (Kovach, 2009). Finally, the self-locating statement acknowledges the individual’s community and supporters, and affirms the knowledge gained from the collective as valid knowledge (Kovach, 2009).

Absolon and Willet (2005) also believe in the power of self-locating within Indigenous methodologies as they state it is the “most fundamental principle” (p. 97). Absolon and Willet (2005) discuss how self-locating can help with developing trust with research participants. Many Indigenous communities are justifiably suspicious of researchers and self-locating helps participants understand the researcher’s intention and builds “relatedness” (Absolon & Willet, 2005, p. 104). Absolon and Willet (2005) also outline clear guidelines regarding the aspects a self-locating statement should include: the researcher’s relationship with everything from land
and spirituality to individuals and community as well as the researcher’s intentions for the work. I used these guidelines to develop my own self-locating statement which can be found in the introduction chapter of this thesis.

Another key aspect to Indigenous methodologies that Kovach (2009) highlights is the grounding of research in Indigenous knowledge, epistemology, and philosophy. Simpson (2011) believes that this means recognizing creation stories as the framework for Indigenous epistemology and ontology. The spiritual realm must be included in Indigenous methodologies and stories are given life, which can be demonstrated with many Indigenous languages’ reliance on verbs rather than the more noun-based English language (Hart, 2010). Absolon and Willet (2005) state that Indigenous epistemology is an ancient epistemology and that Indigenous peoples have actually been conducting research for many years although it was never formally recognized (or legitimized) by the Euro-centric academy. This ancient knowledge includes a vast knowledge of spirituality and ancient stories such as creation stories and while many of the writings on Indigenous methodologies within the academy are fairly recent it is most certainly a well-defined way of conducting research.

Kovach (2009) states there are four core values that must be present in Indigenous research: respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility. These related values ensure the research is done in a good way. For instance the value of respect highlights the importance of the relationships built with the research participants and the value of relevance works with the value of respect to ensure that research has meaning to participants (Kovach, 2009). The values of reciprocity and responsibility ensure that the researcher remains accountable to the community and that there is some form of giving back through the research process (Kovach, 2009).
The value of relationship, according to Weber-Pillwax (2004), “drive[s] the core of the research” (p. 85). She talks about how these researcher-participant relationships can take many years to establish and Barnett, Kendall, McKay, et al. (2010) agree that it is often more prudent to practice Indigenous methodology with participants with whom the researcher has a previously established relationship. Weber-Pillwax (2004) emphasizes that part of the researcher-participant relationship must include a culturally relevant “exchange” (p. 87). In other words, the researcher must be prepared to offer food and/or gifts as deemed appropriate. Other scholars (Kovach, 2009; Ray, 2012), take the value of relationality even farther by including interactions with the spirit world in the form of dreams and visions as part of the relationship the researcher forms with the data as well. For instance, Ray (2012) states that all knowledge belongs to the cosmos and that we humans are mere interpreters of this knowledge, which we can only discover in relationship with the spiritual realm.

In terms of my research, grounding it in Indigenous knowledge, epistemology, and philosophy was accomplished through an emphasis on the core values outlined by Kovach (2009): respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility. For instance, reciprocity within relationship (Weber-Pillwax, 2004), was carried out by selecting participants with whom I already have a prior established relationship. This selection allowed a foundation of trust to be quickly established (Barnett et al., 2010). Reciprocity was also followed in terms of an exchange (Weber-Pillwax, 2004)—I compensated individuals for sharing their experience both monetarily and according to their Indigenous cultures (for examples, tobacco, food were offered).

I also paid attention to the value of responsibility throughout my research. Weber-Pillwax (2004) talks of taking care of research participants. It was important to me that research participants had a positive experience throughout the project and I ensured that they felt
comfortable by following protocols such as an exchange, meeting them in their own communities, and being as clear as possible in regards to the goals of my research. I will also ensure that at the end of the research project the participants have not been negatively impacted and that they feel their contributions have made a difference by staying in contact with the participants and sharing with them how I have integrated their contributions into my life and practice as a social worker.

A third key aspect to Indigenous methodologies that Kovach (2009) references is a situating of the political nature of all research. Kovach (2009) acknowledges the context that Indigenous researchers and Indigenous research methodologies find themselves in the academy, which is characterized by a lack of Indigenous voices and bodies. Indeed, there is a need for Indigenous space. She acknowledges this lacking as being directly connected to the many challenges Indigenous researchers face in finding legitimacy for their research within the academy. Ray (2012) references two types of Indigenous methodologies: strategic, a political methodology that analyzes power relations and convergent, a research methodology with roots in traditional knowledge. Strategic methodology is often incorporated within the academy while convergent is seen as separate and distinct (Ray, 2012).

Absolon (2011) discusses issues with strategic methodology: “measuring Aboriginal knowledges against western criteria is academic racism and colonialism” (p. 27). Yet other scholars (Kovach, 2005; Kovach, 2009; Hart, 2010) recognize the need for Indigenous methodologies to come to an academic definition so to claim legitimacy within the academy. Kovach (2005) states that this can be quite uncomfortable for Indigenous researchers who often have to use a language that is “not one’s own” (p. 20). Simpson (2011) and Thomas (2005) both reference storytelling as an important aspect of Indigenous methodology that is inherently
decolonizing. Storytelling is believed to be a way Indigenous researchers can stay true to their culture while also finding space within the academy (Simpson, 2011; Thomas, 2005). I was able to use storytelling in a strategic way in order to frame my research.

Indigenous methodologies were a good fit, along with YPAR for my thesis project with Indigenous youth. Kendall et al. (2011) cautions researchers against relying solely on PAR methodologies when doing research with Indigenous participants. Kendall et al. (2011) state that all research done with Indigenous participants must have culturally sensitive designs and “match the needs, customs, and standards of Aboriginal communities” (p. 1720). Indigenous methodologies are the only methodologies I believe that meet this goal of culturally sensitive research. Furthermore, Indigenous methodologies place a major emphasis on storytelling (Simpson, 2011; Thomas, 2005; Weber-Pillwax, 2004). This is important because according to Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol, and Hallett (2003) Indigenous youth may prefer working with narratives over other methods. “Research participants should be provided with an opportunity to voice their experiences using their own preferred method” (Kendall et al., 2011, p. 1723).

I also believe that not only are Indigenous methodologies a good fit for Indigenous youth participants, but that they are a good fit for myself as a researcher as well. In the beginning of formulating my research question I doubted whether or not it was appropriate for me, a non-Indigenous researcher, to borrow from Indigenous methodologies. However, after reviewing many articles regarding Indigenous methodologies, I am confident that not only is it appropriate, but that it is necessary in terms of my research and myself as a researcher. Madden (2015) summarizes: “one does not necessarily need to be a culture bearer to engage Indigenous knowledges and pedagogical methods respectfully, in relation, and through appropriate protocols” (p. 5).
However, it was still vital for me, as a non-Indigenous researcher, to tread carefully. Dumbrill and Green (2008) state that the best action for white researchers within the academy is engage in “dismantling Eurocentrism” (p. 498) and to ensure that white researchers are not taking anything away from the Indigenous culture. Brooks et al. (2015) believe that self-locating and reflexivity are techniques that are necessary for non-Indigenous researcher to engage in: “we were reflexive in on our roles as non-Aboriginals seeking Aboriginal perspectives and concerned that we may just not get it” (p. 710, italics in original).

I also took comfort from Weber-Pillwax’s (2004) assertion that Indigenous methodologies can be useful when the researcher wants to effect positive change. It is my hope that the results of my research will provide more clarity to non-Indigenous youth service-providers and that this new perspective will be positive for Indigenous youth. It is also my hope that the youth participants in the study will feel empowered and will have their voices heard in a way that they may not have been heard before.

Both YPAR and Indigenous methodologies were useful for my work with Indigenous youth. YPAR’s tenets of participation, learning, empowerment, and social action (Kendall et al., 2011) combined with Indigenous methodology’s emphasis of self-locating; values such as respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility; and a recognition of the political nature of research (Kovach, 2009) were appropriate when I conducted research with Indigenous youth.

**Study Design**

The proposed study, as mentioned followed the theoretical basis of anti-oppressive theory and Indigenous theories and made use of Youth Participation Action Research (YPAR) and Indigenous methodology (as outlined by Kovach (2009)). Themes of relationship-building, critical self-location, praxis (turning research into action), and storytelling were incorporated in
each step of the study design. Recruiting of study participants, gathering data, and analyzing the data will be outlined in this section of my thesis.

**Participant Selection Strategy**

I recruited eight Indigenous youth participants/co-researchers for my study. In keeping with the principles of Indigenous methodologies, it was important that the relationship between the youth participants/co-researchers and myself was already established (Barnett et al., 2010; Weber-Pillwax, 2004). McDowell (2015) states that a researcher working with Indigenous youth should have a genuine interest in the research participants and a prior established relationship helped facilitate this for me. I invited youth from various communities, an isolated First Nation community, an accessible rural First Nation community, and a small urban area with a high Indigenous population to participate in the study. The youth were between the ages of 18-24. It was my hope that the participants would be old enough in order to be somewhat reflective while still being young enough to be included in the youth population, hence only those over 18 and under age 25 were chosen. I used an expanded definition of youth, which advocates for those under the age of 25 to be classified as “youth” rather than the more conventional definition of under 18 (Cohen, 2016; UNESCO, 1982). Youth were initially invited through conversations with me and then I followed a more formal process of recruiting which is outlined in the ethics section.

The participants of the study were permitted to recommend to the researcher additional interested participants, a process known as snowball sampling, and were asked to introduce the researcher to the participant in order to establish trust as Indigenous methodology principles (Potts & Brown, 2005). One participant was recruited this way. I established a relationship with
this participant by ensuring that our first meeting was through our mutual friend and that trust was established. I have also kept in touch with this participant since the study via social media.

**Data Collection**

Principles of Indigenous methodology (as outlined by Kovach (2009)), YPAR, and anti-oppressive theory were adhered to in each stage of gathering the data.

Prior to gathering data from participants I developed my own self-locating statement, a process Absolon and Willett (2005) term “a critical starting point” (p. 106). I followed guidelines for self-location by Absolon and Willett (2005), Dumbrill and Green (2008), Kovach (2009), and Stock and Grover (2013). Using these guidelines helped me to develop a self-locating statement that placed me within the colonial system while explaining who I am to the research participants. I shared my self-locating statement with the research participants in order to establish relatedness and to help them understand my intentions for research (Absolon & Willett, 2005). According to Moosa-Mitha (2005), a self-locating statement is also consistent with anti-oppressive theory and can help one see how they may be an oppressor and someone who is oppressed at the same time. Self-locating highlights complexities and humbles a researcher to an important stance of “not-knowing” (Moosa-Mitha, 2005, p. 66).

Once I developed a self-locating statement, I was able to start the process of data gathering with the participants/co-researchers. However, I kept my self-locating statement in mind and maintained an attitude of researcher reflexivity throughout the process (Brooks et al., 2015; Nissen & Curry-Stevens, 2012). YPAR and Indigenous methodologies both call for the research participants to have control over the entire research process (Kendall et al., 2011; Thomas, 2005). The first step that I took in data collection was to check in with the participants/co-researchers of the study as to whether or not my research question resonated with
them. The feedback I received regarding my research question was overwhelmingly positive; the participants all believed this was a relevant research question.

Kumsa et al. (2013) suggest forming a research advisory group in order to inform the study and McDowell (2015) believes that the advisory group for her research was essential to the entire process. I invited interested participants to form such a group with the purpose of checking whether or not my research makes sense and whether or not it will be useful to the Indigenous youth community. In addition to participants, I invited an elder and community representatives to sit on the advisory committee. None of the Indigenous youth who participated in this study were interested in the time commitment necessary for a research advisory group. However, I was able to engage a respected community member with regards to my research question and then in regards to my data analysis. I was also able to check with each participant/co-researcher as to the validity of my research question and received a positive response.

I was then able to proceed with data collection in the form of qualitative interviews with Indigenous youth participants. The interviews took place at a spot of the participant’s choosing which varied from at the participant’s home or a community agency. Each interview began with reciprocity as per Indigenous methodology outlined by Weber-Pillwax (2004). This reciprocity took the form of food, gifts, and/or tobacco depending on the youth’s own cultural protocol. Interviews lasted for approximately 1-2 hours. While I did have an interview question guide (which participants had the opportunity to review ahead of time), I used an open-ended approach to the interviews, which allowed for “courageous conversations” (Dumbrill & Green, 2008, p. 2008) in which the youth felt comfortable to share their stories. Participants were monetarily compensated for their time and the interviews were audio recorded. More details regarding these protocols can be found in the ethics section.
In order for participants to feel comfortable sharing their stories it was important to establish trust. Garrett et al. (2014) state that when developing trust with Indigenous participants it is useful to ask about the youth’s experience of oppression, where they/their family is from, and about intergenerational history. Dumbrill and Green (2008) believe that researcher participation in community events and visiting research participants often can also be effective in establishing trust. Kendall et al. (2011) say that “sustaining an environment of mutual respect and openness, demonstrating flexibility in adapting a project to work at the pace of participating communities, and involving the community from the beginning” (p. 1724) are principles of YPAR researchers can make use of when promoting trust. I made use of all of these techniques in building relationships with the participants of my proposed study.

In keeping with principles of YPAR and Indigenous methodologies it is prudent to allow youth to express themselves in the way they feel most comfortable (Dumbrill & Green, 2008; Watter et al., 2012) and I allowed for youth to engage in written communication or communication expressed through art work or other means within the context of the qualitative interview. Paper and art supplies were available for interview participants to use during the interview should they rather provide information through these means rather than through conversation. None of the youth I interviewed chose this option. In keeping with principles of anti-oppressive and Indigenous theories it was be vital for me, the researcher to listen in a political way (Potts & Green, 2005). In other words, I attended to assumptions, biases, and power and addressed elements of colonization within the stories the participants shared.

Throughout the data gathering process I was committed to reflexivity through the use of research memos, extensive notes, and member-checking with participants (Nissen & Curry-Stevens, 2012). I also remained aware of my membership in the dominant, white, colonizer
group (Dumbrill & Green, 2008; Stock & Grover, 2013). Throughout the research process I participated in a research study that examines white privilege, which gave me the chance to formally reflect on this membership. I was also committed to praxis during the data gathering process keeping in mind that my relationship with research participants extends beyond the analysis stage (Allen, Mohatt, Markstrom, Byers, & Novins 2012).

**Data Analysis**

According to Potts and Brown (2005), data is “a gift that participants bestow and we work to respect those gifts and treat them ethically” (p. 269). I maintained this view throughout the research process, particularly in the data analysis stage. I used the gifts the participants gave me and organized them into themes through a process laid out by O’Reilly (2009) who calls for data organization into patterns, sub-patterns, and generalizations while also involving the youth participants and my Indigenous advisor in the analysis process. Kovach (2009) herself uses a thematic analysis to organize her research while staying true to Indigenous methodological principles such as kindness, gentleness, sustainability, and relationality. While I and co-researchers used coding techniques outlined by the thematic process O’Reilly (2009) focuses on, I was careful to contextualize the findings by keeping as much of the participants’ voices within the stories I presented since I recognized that coding, breaking down into smaller parts, can be counter to Indigenous ways of analyzing data (Kovach, 2009).

According to O’Reilly (2009), coding the data happens only through extensive re-examination of the data and that it is only through this very close inspection that patterns begin to emerge. As these patterns begin to emerge I made memos that began as open, deductive memos and eventually moved into more focused, inductive memos (O’Reilly, 2009). From these more focused, inductive memos I was able to derive some generalizations which answered my
initial research question: What have service providers done that have been helpful or harmful to Indigenous youth?

The analysis was also guided by principles from anti-oppressive theory, meaning the analysis was meant to be decolonizing in nature focusing on strengths and liberation (Potts & Brown, 2005; Simpson, 2011; Thomas, 2005). It was also important to me that the analysis be inherently Indigenous. Brass (2000) performed Indigenous analysis of his data for his thesis focusing on Indigenous youth by ensuring that he stayed emerged in Indigenous culture throughout the process. For instance, attending ceremonies and cultural events helped Brass (2000) incorporate a holistic, Indigenous perspective into his analysis. I attended a sweat, a pow-wow, and a sundance during this research process to help me to stay true to Indigenous data analysis by staying emerged in Indigenous cultures. Attending these ceremonies was important to my research as it helped me to go beyond analysis based on books and the academy and helped me to access my heart knowledge.

Finally, commitments to relationship, reflexivity, and praxis were adhered to in the analysis stage. Member-checks, asking research participants if my analysis rang true to them was important in attending to the relationship (Nissen Curry-Stevens, 2012) as was continuing the relationships through visits and hospitality (Baskin et al., 2008). I also continued to be reflexive and aware of my participation in the dominant white colonizing culture during the analysis stage. Being aware of my voice in the interpretation of the gift of data was of paramount importance to ensure the data was presented in an emancipatory way (Potts & Brown, 2005). According to Sarche and Whitesell (2012), “identifying problems among native youth will not serve them well unless effective and appropriate interventions are made available to them” (p. 45). This study focused on what can actually be done (praxis) to improve services to youth. Since I am also a
practicing social worker directly involved in providing services to Indigenous youth, I will be able to implement the findings of this study in my work and continue my commitment to praxis.

Ethics

**Principles**

When conducting research with the Indigenous population it is vital that the researcher adhere to specific principles in order to prevent harm. This is why I adhered to the principles of *Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession* (OCAP®) (First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC), 2014). The ownership principle ensures that the ownership of community knowledge belongs to the community and so consent is required should the researcher want to publish this knowledge (FNIGC, 2014). The control principle outlines the input that Indigenous peoples must have over the research including the framework, data analysis and management, and dissemination (FNIGC, 2014). The access principle ensures that Indigenous communities are able to examine all data and research that relates to them (FNIGC, 2014). Finally, the possession principle confirms that Indigenous communities will determine where and how data will be stored and maintained (Kovach, 2009, FNIGC, 2014).

In terms of my research, through conversations with my Indigenous advisor and member checking with the participants I was able to ensure that the principles of OCAP were adapted. I obtained consent from the youth prior to conducting my research and they had the opportunity to provide input in the actual research design. The participants were also able to easily access the research data and were encouraged to make changes if they were represented incorrectly.

**Research Instruments**

Research instruments consisted of an explanation of my research question and my intention for doing this research (see Appendix A), which was approved by my advisor. Another
research instrument was the interview guide (see Appendix B), which was used for the one on one qualitative interviews with research participants and myself, the researcher. Research participants in the one on one qualitative interviews also received an explanation of the research and my intentions for doing the research (see Appendix A). Research participants were also given the opportunity to express themselves through writing or drawing if they wished and paper, writing utensils, and art supplies were available to them for this purpose. None of the research participants chose to express themselves in this way.

I recognized that there could have been a small emotional risk to participants sharing their experiences of being helped by helpers. While sharing stories can be a painful process, the healing that one experiences from sharing a story should not be downplayed (Aniuk & Gillies, 2012; Dumbrill & Green, 2008). Also since I had a relationship with each youth participant I am hopeful that they would have told me if sharing their story had caused them emotional harm. Despite this, a list of community resources (see Appendix C) was made available to participants if they wished to seek counsel for any difficulties they may have experienced during the interview.

**Participants**

The participants with whom I already had a prior relationship with were recruited through social media (see Appendix D) and were given the option as to whether or not they would like to participate in the study. All of the participants I asked agreed to be part of the study however none of the participants wished to be part of the research advisory group. A respected Indigenous community member, Adriana was instrumental in helping me fill this gap by providing oversight and advice.
The youth participants were from two First Nations communities, one isolated and one accessible as well as the city of Winnipeg and were between the ages of 18-24. I used an expanded definition of youth which advocates for those under the age of 25 to be classified as “youth” rather than the more conventional definition of under 18 (Cohen, 2016, UNESCO, 1982).

**Informed Consent**

Participants understood the nature of the study before they agreed to participate in the study as per the recruitment letter (see Appendix D). Prior to the one-on-one interview, I again explained the nature of the study and participants received a copy of the questions at least a week before the date of their qualitative interview (see Appendix B). Participants understood prior to the one on one interview that it would take approximately one to two hours, that it would be audio recorded, and that they would also have the opportunity to communicate in other methods like writing or drawing should they wish.

**Feedback/Debriefing**

As per YPAR and Indigenous research protocols including OCAP, participants were involved with every step of the research process therefore in terms of feedback, participants had the opportunity to receive and respond to updates throughout the analysis process. I prepared a brief non-technical summary of the research findings through email which was made available to participants as soon as data analysis was completed. Participants will also be invited to participate or co-present any presentations the researcher may conduct in regards to this study and will be given final copies of the thesis should they wish to receive one.

**Anonymity and Confidentiality**
Data from qualitative one on one interviews was collected in the form of auto recordings and notes/memos. Participants had the choice to be identified by a pseudonym in all accounts of the research in order to protect their confidentiality. Kira, Caprice, Carson, Martin and Jeff are pseudonyms while Asinnapis, Jasmine, and Shania are the participants’ real names. Since I did not receive band permission I did not name the specific communities the youth were from. In order to keep community anonymity I did need to slightly change the details of two accounts provided in the qualitative interviews. All information was kept strictly confidential. As per OCAP, ownership of the data belongs to the participants and participants received all their own personal data. Documents related to the interviews and audio recordings were stored on my password-protected personal computer. Hand-written notes and participant media was stored in a locked cabinet in my home. I transcribed all of the interviews and, in the process, removed personal identifiers in the cases where participants did not want to be identified. All documents will be shredded and/or deleted if the participants wished or if they did not wish for the documentation to be destroyed it will be returned to them.

**Compensation**

Participants were compensated $50.00 for the interview. Compensation was in the form of cash and was given at the beginning of each interview.

**Dissemination**

Study results are disseminated in this masters of social work thesis. The results may also be used in conferences or academic journals. In order to remain true to principles of OCAP and YPAR, the study results will also be given to all research participants and the communities the research was conducted in. Presentations of the results will be conducted in each community with direct involvement of the research participants.
I also remained committed to Indigenous research methodological principles of praxis, turning research into action, and relationships. I plan on using the results of this study in my own social work practice with Indigenous youth and I also plan on continuing the relationships that I will have with the research participants.
Chapter 5: Study Findings

This chapter presents qualitative interviews with eight Indigenous youth. Four of the youth at the time of the interview lived in an isolated First Nation community in Manitoba and four of the youth at the time of the interview lived in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Three of the youth identify as male and five of the youth identify as female. When analyzing the interview transcripts using thematic analysis as set out by O’Reilly (2009) four major themes emerged. The first theme to be discussed is the theme of “identity”—the way the youth described themselves and their communities. It also includes the racism they have encountered and the resilience they have fostered both of which were key to understanding the ways in helpers have or have not been helpful. The second theme that emerged was the theme of “helping”. The youth talked in-depth of helpers who had been helpful and they reflected on specific instances in which helpers had been particularly helpful. The theme of “unhelpful” also emerged, each youth was able to recount several examples of times when helpers had let them down or had even harmed them. Finally, directly connected to this theme were the participants’ own ideas on how helpers can improve their practice to better meet the needs of Indigenous youth.

Identity

I began the interviews by asking youth about their identities. The very first question I asked each youth was simply “who are you?”. From my prior research which was outlined in my literature review it became obvious to me that in order to best understand how to help Indigenous youth, helpers need to understand Indigenous youth identity in order to help them potentially reconstruct resilient Indigenous youth identities (Brooks et al., 2015).

How youth identified themselves
The interviewed youth identified themselves based on individual characteristics, family, community, culture, and land-based characteristics. One of the female youth, Caprice said that a big part of her identity was being a “girl” and one of the male youth, Martin talked about being “a big tall guy”. The youth also each had different words to describe their Indigeneity. Kira identified herself as “Native”; Asinnapis identified herself as “Aboriginal”; Shania identified herself as “Indigenous”; Jeff and Caprice identified themselves as “First Nations”; Martin identified himself as “Métis”; Carson identified himself as “Anishinaabe”; and Jasmine identified herself as “Anishinaabe”, “Nakota”, and “Indigenous” depending on the situation.

Other youth talked about the roles they have in their lives as being identifying features. One youth talked about being a student and another, Carson talked about finding his way as a student and taking on the identity of “class clown”. Some of the youth talked about the way that they feel about themselves as part of their identity both positively and negatively. Asinnapis stated “I like the way I am” and later she said when describing herself in relation to white helpers, “I feel like I’m not a normal person”. Shania discussed that the way she felt about herself directly related to the racism and discrimination that she faced:

It’s discrimination and racism, if you haven’t experienced then you wouldn’t know the long-term effects it has on someone and how it literally shatters every piece of self-esteem and self-worth they’ve had. And growing up I barely had any so now it’s really hard because I have none at all.

The interviewed youth also identified themselves based on their families. Two of the youth talked about how being a mother was important to them and Shania went on to describe her large family which included eleven people varying from her parents to her nephews and nieces. Asinnapis, a youth from an isolated First Nation community revealed how her family included her community: “we’re like a really big family,” she said. Indeed many of the youth talked about the importance of community and how it informed their identity. Jasmine really
highlighted this point when she talked about her current residence versus her identified community:

Well I grew up in [one reserve]. I lived there for 4 years. But it wasn’t like consecutive 4 years. It was like Winnipeg mostly. The thing though with my whole Indigenous way that I look at things is I identify myself as [part of an accessible rural First Nation community] because that’s where I’m registered. Even though I’ve never lived there, I still identify there because that’s where my home is kind of thing like that’s where I feel most comfortable. So whenever I introduce myself I say I’m from [that community] and I never say that I’m from [the other reserve] or Winnipeg because I can never support that view. Like if someone tried to ask me things about [that other reserve] I wouldn’t have a strong opinion about it because I’m really not from there so I just say [an accessible rural First Nation community] because that’s where I’m most involved.

Many of the youth interviewed had a very positive view of their community. Asinnapis stated two times, “I love my community” and she talked about the encouragement that she receives from her community as well as the safety she feels most of the time. “I’ve never experienced racism over here,” she said. Jeff, one of the interviewed youth from an isolated First Nation community stated that living there was “very different than the person who lives off of the city”. He discussed some of the difficulty of living here compared to living in the city of Winnipeg in terms of “making things work, make a fire, go get the water, we had no power tool” and concluded that “it’s easier living as a city youth”.

The youth interviewed from Winnipeg also spoke positively about their community. Shania had a fairly balanced view of Winnipeg but emphasized the more favourable aspects:

What’s cool about Winnipeg is that we’re like the largest urban reserve in Canada and it’s good but it’s also bad sometimes. So the good thing I guess would be that there’s a lot of people that do follow the respectfulness and mindfulness and so when you walk down the street and you see another Indigenous person like you go up to them and say “hey” and you kind of have a sense of belonging knowing that they would say “hey” back and so that was really nice.

However, Shania and Carson both mentioned that they only really felt comfortable in Winnipeg when they were living in pockets that had a large Indigenous population.
Carson who also grew up on reserve spoke negatively about his community:

It’s actually a pretty bad reserve to be honest with you. Like there’s a lot of good people that are there but as the community wide, everyone seems like all over the place. I can’t take into account because I don’t live there so I’m just going based off of what people say. But a lot of things happen in [my reserve] and it’s always not good. The only people who are like friendly is this family and close friends that you know but everything else is pretty hectic over there.

Overall though youth spoke quite highly of their communities.

The youth also spoke about the importance Indigenous culture has in shaping their identity. Cultural teachings such as the seven sacred teachings including respect as well as cultural values such as humour were revealed as being key to identity. Cultural activities and ceremonies such as sundances, sweat lodge ceremonies, and pipe ceremonies were discussed as ways to access the Indigenous culture. Shania spoke strongly of the teaching of respect and how it directly informed her identity:

To have a tradition that’s very respectful of all people and a culture that’s very respectful of all people and living things is something that I’m also very proud of. Because we are taught growing up to be respectful and mindful of everyone and everything around you so that’s really something I’m proud to say when I say “I’m Indigenous” it’s kind of like saying “I’m respectful and I’m going to respect you”.

Whereas Carson talked about the value of humour as something that sets his Indigenous identity apart from a non-Indigenous identity:

We never really got along with the non-Indigenous groups…it has a lot to do with our humour I believe because, you know something crazy happens and it’s just “oh my god” right and for us we would just burst out laughing because that was just a messed up situation (laughter).

Jeff noted that the youth in his remote community were becoming more interested in accessing their identity through culture:

I’ve been seeing a lot of cultural activities in this reserve, there’s lots like Sundances sweat lodges, ceremonies like Pipe ceremonies. And how there’s seven teachings like telling you what to do. Just trying to make this culture still alive so that the young kids can learn too what the others have been teaching us.
Half of the interviewed youth specifically stated that a connection to the land was directly related to being Indigenous and to their own identities. Specifically being “first” on the land stood out to these four youth. Shania talked about how she was “really proud” of that fact and Caprice talked about not understanding the racism she has seen because of that fact. For instance, when asked how she feels about the racism she has witnessed she stated, “I felt sad. Why would they want to do that? Like I get angry and hurt. Then I just think about, ‘this is our land, we were here first’”.

The struggle of being an Indigenous youth

Each of the interviewed youth were asked the question, “what is it like being an Indigenous youth?”. Although two of the youth, both from an isolated First Nation community, responded positively and cited their community as the reason, the majority talked about how difficult it was to grow up as an Indigenous youth. For instance, Kira, a youth from an isolated First Nation community stated “it’s hard”. She then revealed that it was hard because she felt “stuck” and felt like she had no option but to live in her current community. Martin talked about how it was a “struggle at some points because while growing up I’d get bullied and when I was in Saskatoon I got abused from my dad”. Jasmine discussed how the lack of supports contributed to the difficulty of growing up Indigenous particularly the lack of support that she had when moving back and forth from Winnipeg to reserve. Shania and Carson both cited racism as the reason why growing up Indigenous was such a struggle.

In fact, when asked to elaborate, each of the interviewed youth had multiple stories of racist encounters that they had personally experienced or witnessed. Garrett et al. (2014) assert the importance of asking Indigenous youth about their experiences with racism or oppression when establishing trust. This became clear to me in each interview as I witnessed each youth
open up with stories of the negativity they have experienced. It was vital for me to hear these stories in order to understand the youth and how their identities have been partially shaped by a world that still does not accept them. These racist encounters can be thought of in three categories: (1) personal experiences of racism, (2) observations of systemic racism, and (3) the complications that arise from living in “multifarious worlds” (Brooks et al., 2015, p. 715).

Many of the youth talked about times when they experienced overt racism, situations in which it was clear that the reason they were experiencing a negative reaction from another person was because they looked Indigenous. For instance, both Shania and Jasmine discussed times when other students had directly belittled the Indigenous culture. Shania talked about a group of students:

This group of boys, there were like Caucasian and Filipino and they started like, how would you say it, they started like kind of mocking the drum sounds like they were holding air and doing that and they started singing and they started moving their heads back and forth and they were like “oh brown people are just excited Justin Trudeau got into office so they could get a lot of money”.

While Jasmine revealed an experience that she had with another student in her art class:

He like came up to me and sat in art class and all we had to do was draw art from like, and count our hours of the amount of art we’d be drawing. It doesn’t even have to be very good art. So he comes over, he walks, and he’s like a cartoon artist and he drew like two tipis and then he drew two penis figures in front of them that look Native and he’s like “hey look it’s your relatives”.

Other interviewed youth discussed some of the more covert racist encounters that they had experienced. Asinnapis and Jeff both talked about the way they were treated by people in the service industry as evidence of racism. For instance, while visiting her grandparents in a hotel in Winnipeg Asinnapis had the following experience:

At that hotel when I went inside to the elevator this woman showed up, the manager, and she was demanding, like I don’t know, she was very mean. She kept telling me to get out. I don’t know why.
Jeff also experienced racism while he was visiting Winnipeg and he pointed to a negative experience he had while on a city bus: “I was sitting in the back the bus before and I was trying to get out of the bus and we were pressing that ‘ding’ thing and that bus driver didn't even stop”. Shania’s experience of covert racism was a little different. Shania talked about a feeling she got around non-Indigenous people, a feeling of not being trusted:

So kind of knowing that because I was Indigenous that people didn’t trust me because of that, people thought of me negatively because I was Indigenous, always being silenced because of who I was, always being looked at as a bad person and not really rather looking at the good stuff that I’ve been doing.

Not only did the youth share many personal stories and experiences of racism they also each shared about the way racism within society has affected their identity and the identity of their peers. Each youth was asked about what they think regarding the fact that many Indigenous reserves do not have high schools for their youth to attend or the high schools that do exist are not adequately meeting the needs of Indigenous youth on reserve. The immediate response to this issue was, across the board, negative. “That’s sad,” said Kira. Asinnapis actually had the experience of moving away from her reserve to Winnipeg for high school and she said, “I think that’s just, I don’t know, sad. Because I know how it feels like to be away from home. Especially at such a young age”. Although Jasmine had never personally experienced moving from her community to attend school many of her peers had and she observed the following:

It was really weird for them because they’d say, “why can’t I just have this at home? Like my mom’s there, my grandma’s there”. Then when like someone would pass away it would be such a big thing for them because some of them couldn’t even afford to go back. They couldn’t even afford to go to their grandma’s funeral that they knew all their life and they couldn’t even see their mom and they were hurting in the city. That’s usually when they’d like retreat back and drop out of school because they were so emotionally unstable.

Many of the interviewed youth spoke about how this situation needs to change. Martin’s immediate response was: “I probably say build a few schools” while Carson and Caprice agreed
that while having education available on reserves is important they also both recognized the need for *quality* education. For instance, Caprice stated:

> They should have a high school everywhere, instead of shipping them out. there’s a good side to it too because there’s a better education there in the city instead of over here there’s non-certified teachers, a lot of them, there’s so many non-certified teachers.

Shania also called on society to do better by Indigenous youth and she had this to say in regards to the issue of a lack of high schools on reserve:

> So just to go to school, like not having that accessibility to your right to an education is really upsetting. It also really bugs me because when you live in the city there’s high schools everywhere but a lot of people like living in their community on their land kind of within the land not within the colonized society.

The education system was not the only facet of society where the interviewed youth noticed racism. Society in general, the child welfare system, and the justice system were other facets that the youth found to be racist. For instance, Jeff talked about how he does not feel safe in the city of Winnipeg because he believes that if something were to happen to him that no one would help him. He said, “a lot of people neglect…native people when something bad happen[s], they just stare or just walk away. Like they don't even bother calling the cops. Maybe they're just too scared”. Jasmine also believes that Indigenous people are not safe in society: “I could go on with the stories but a lot of it has to do with the society, the way they look at us. The way that it’s okay to treat us with slurs and slang”.

Shania talked about the racism that she sees in the child welfare system:

> Another thing that's pretty obvious is with the child welfare system. So indigenous children and youth only make up 5% of the Canadian population but they make up over half of the percentage in the child welfare system. Like usually the kids are apprehended for good reasons because they're in an unsafe situation but sometimes it’s for really not bad things that they're being taken away from.

Many of the youth talked about the lack of trust they have experienced around social workers and how it stems directly from the racism experienced in the child welfare system.
The justice system was another area given attention when speaking with the youth. Jeff spoke about the justice system more broadly and talked about how angry he was at the lack of power Indigenous people have because of the amount of bills or laws they have to follow. He stated that he wishes that Indigenous people could just go ahead and do certain things on reserve but they are unable to because of the government resistance:

They neglect whenever native people want something done but they just don't do it. They just rather set up bills if we resist them. They set up a bill right away and then they'll say, “you can't fight us because then it's part of our bill if you fight us, you'll be arrested”.

Whereas Shania spoke more specifically about police brutality and increased incarceration rates of Indigenous people:

Indigenous youth get more time served than non-Indigenous youth and that’s a big thing that’s still going on even with other minorities. Your justice system is supposed to protect everyone fairly but Indigenous youth wouldn’t feel that sense of equality when it comes to being judged on them as a person and not the crime they committed.

Colonization and stories of historical racism were also extensively shared and youth talked about how it informed their sense of identity and how they feel as Indigenous people.

Shania summed up how she feels about colonization and the continued effects that she sees for herself and her generation:

I guess when genocide hits it hits pretty hard so I guess something that hit my race hard is obviously the Indian Residential Schools. So I guess that hit them really hard but the non-Indigenous people were still like chilling, doing whatever while they were trying to kind of eliminate a whole culture as is through these schools. Also pushing them away from society while bringing their children into society was really weird and really confusing. That kind of plays a role in how the next generation was kind of taught... the next generation comes, these guys are just finished suffering a really awful experience with residential schools so it leaves an effect on the next generation. The next generation reaches out for help but these guys don’t want to help because they were taught that Indigenous people, their culture is the “devil” kind of thing and it kind of continues on.

Kira and Caprice both shared stories of racism that their families were part of in the past that still had an effect on them today. Kira talked about how the government reacted to her
reserve when many people were getting sick and she shared that they simply prepared for the deaths of community members rather than treating the sick people. Supplies to clean up after death were ordered and treatment supplies were not. Caprice talked about how some of her family members were in Ontario when the doctors there sterilized child bearing women without their consent. She revealed that stories like this make her feel “angry and hurt”.

Absolutely key to understanding Indigenous youth identity is to understand that many Indigenous youth live in “multifarious worlds” (Brooks et al., 2015, p. 715). Brooks et al. (2015) talk about how trying to fit into these multifarious worlds can lead to a loss of a sense of self and that it is crucial to reconcile a tribal as well as mainstream identity in order to form a resilient Indigenous youth identity. It can be the role of helpers in these youths’ lives to help them reconcile these two, at times opposing, identities. Because I interviewed four youth from a tight-knit, remote reserve community and four youth who currently live in a large urban centre (Winnipeg), I received varied and interesting responses in regards to this issue of multifarious worlds. Three of the youth from this remote community also had the experience of living in urban centres for extended periods of time and two of the youth currently living in Winnipeg also had the experience of living on reserves for extended periods of time.

Two of the youth from an isolated First Nation community pointed out the challenges of living there but they also thought that being Indigenous and living in this community was easier than living in the city: “I think it’s easier to live here like as an Aboriginal rather than living in the city,” Asinnapis said. One of the youth currently living in Winnipeg shared her aunt’s perspective stating that her aunt believes that reserves are safer than cities for Indigenous people:

So what I’ve also heard from my aunts is that she doesn’t live in the city and she lives in the reserve because she doesn’t trust the city. The city life is corrupt to her and this is where a lot of Indigenous women and girls go missing, a lot of violence toward Indigenous people.
However, Kira revealed that she feels “stuck” in the reserve and Jeff talked about how difficult it is to get resources in his remote community. He said, “maybe that’s why a lot of kids are killing themselves because they’re sick of the same rez. They’re not really getting much help”. One of the Winnipeg youth, Carson, also talked about Indigenous youth suicide and the reason he believes so many Indigenous youth end their own lives. After being asked about culture and the lack of familiarity some Indigenous youth have with their culture he said: “that’s a problem with the young people now too. To be honest with you I think that’s one of the main causes of suicide because they don’t know their community or themselves.”

Indeed, literature has pointed to a lack of identity as being directly correlated to completion of suicide particularly for Indigenous youth (Chandler et al., 2003). It was interesting to me that these youth were talking about suicide unprompted and that many of them related it to a feeling of loss of identity which included transitioning from reserve to city or vice versa, in other words, living in multifarious worlds. Both Jasmine and Carson, youth who currently live in the city but who both had experience living on reserve talked about how difficult it was to transition back and forth especially in relation to their education. They spoke of how challenging school was in Winnipeg compared to the reserve and they also spoke of having difficulty making friends in both places because they were not really accepted in either. For instance, Jasmine talked about her experience transitioning to the reserve after spending time in Winnipeg:

It was hard for me to transition back and forth because when I came back to the reserve I was treated like not a real Native because I’d been living like not on the reserve and so it was hard because you’re trying to find friends and you’re trying to be like connected to people in the reserve but no one wants to talk to you because you’re not from the reserve kind of technically speaking.

While Carson discussed having a hard time making friends in the city compared to the reserve:
Going to school in a non-Indigenous community it was hard and not to mention the kids seemed kind of rude because you were dumb and talked to the teacher and the teacher felt like this kid needs more help. And you feel self-conscious about yourself and not smart and the kids treated you differently too. And it was hard.

**Resilience**

In addition to the many stories in which the interviewed youth shared their own and other Indigenous youths’ struggles there were also reflections of resilience. Strategies that they employed individually and as a community, as well as strategies that came from Indigenous culture were revealed as effective ways to strengthen identity and be able to deal with some of the struggles unique to Indigenous youth. The interviewed youth talked about some of the creative strategies that they used as individuals to navigate the multifarious worlds, deal with racist peers, and overcome feelings of worthlessness.

Jasmine and Carson both talked about having a “white voice” that they used when needing to talk to people from the white world and both were able to switch back to their regular voices when they were with other Indigenous people. Carson even revealed that he was using his “white voice” while being interviewed! This is the conversation that he and I had:

As for my family, my family pretty well from both sides they’re pretty well educated. Like pretty well everyone graduated from high school and they work on the reserve and they do all these things and to top it off they have to be smart and they have to talk. There’s a saying with the majority of our people that we have a “white talk” that we have to talk and like we’re using our “white voice” and that’s how we say it. Interviewer: so are you using your white voice right now (laughter)? Yeah! yeah! (laughter) because we have to be on par with people.

Jasmine also talked about using her Indigenous identity to her advantage in order to keep other students in her class from hurting her:

So it was like every time someone tried to threaten me I’d say I’d fight them and so they were like “oh she’s native yeah she will so we better not mess with her”. So no one ever really tried me because I did actually like fight a couple girls once but after that no one bothered me and so it was good after that.
While Shania spoke of being able to overcome feelings of worthlessness which stemmed from the racism and discrimination that she faced:

A thing that really helps me overcome I guess these thoughts of like no self worth at all would be kind of looking back on things that I’ve already done so things that brighten my mood up and thinking about all the stuff that I’ve already done and all the stuff that’s going to be coming on to my path. So that’s something that really helps is just taking the time to reflect on life in general.

The interviewed youth also talked about the people in their circle or community as helping them deal with their struggles. Asinnapis, Jeff, and Caprice, all youth from an isolated First Nation community talked about how the community helps them. Asinnapis said, “you get a lot of help over here cause there’s lots of relatives over here that are willing to help and you can just go up to someone and just ask for help and you’ll get it”. Shania spoke of a team of supportive people that she has developed who help her feel like she can accomplish her goals and Carson and Jasmine both talked about having friends that make them feel safe. Jasmine also said that having Indigenous people to talk to about the racism that she experiences has helped “calm” her down.

Finally, the youth revealed that Indigenous culture was instrumental in helping them develop more resilient identities. Carson talked about a cultural value, “manoo” meaning to “let things go”:

I don’t really focus on it. It’s always going to be around, people are always going to say something bad, it’s just the way the world is, can't really focus on the negative things that happen to you. Just move on and go past it “manoo” that’s what they say, just move on and let it go. “Manoo,” just let it go. It’s just that part of your life, it doesn’t control you, it doesn’t do anything for you it’s just not important, that one part can go. It’s like “yeah that was yesterday already, don’t worry about it already, it’s gone, it’s done”

Kira and Caprice both also spoke of the value of letting things go. “I just let it go. I can do that more than others because they have different thoughts,” said Caprice.

Whereas Jasmine focused more on the activities of the Indigenous culture:
Well I think for me like a lot of it was my culture like a lot. Like a lot of my family and stuff are cultural aware. But not a lot of them are culturally practicing until I got older. So they would tell me things that our people used to do or they would just tell me little facts. Like how the Sioux, the Sioux was a big one of them so they would just tell me things like that. I would go medicine picking. I would go to teachings so that was also what helped me. But I think the thing that mostly helped me was like praying like the way they taught me to pray and stuff so if it wasn’t for that prayer and knowing that there’s always spirits around watching and that they’re going to help me and see what happens and it will be okay then I probably wouldn’t have gotten through a lot of stuff.

Indeed, every single youth interviewed talked about cultural activities as being key ways to engage Indigenous youth and to strengthen Indigenous youth identity. This will be discussed in the more in the following themes.

**Helpful Helpers**

**The Colonial Issues**

There were several issues other than identity and racism that the interviewed youth talked about needing help with. Education was a huge issue that every single youth talked about followed closely by the issue of safety. Other issues that were discussed included feeling alone or stuck and needing help with practical things such as housing.

Many of the youth spoke of education on reserve versus education in the city. As was already discussed, the youth all believed that education should be readily available on reserve but that it needs to be the same quality as the education offered in the city. Caprice, a youth from an isolated First Nation community stated, “I think they have a better school up there than here. We’re struggling over here as I can see”. While Carson and Jasmine both talked about students needing extra help from teachers when they were studying in Winnipeg and coming off reserve; according to Carson:

For them coming off the reserve like that then going to a school where you have to keep up with the things, you have to do these things, you have set deadlines. A lot of them can’t speak up for themselves. That’s one of the major things. I don’t know if you’re well aware from the previous people, but they have a hard time sticking up for themselves
because I don’t know if they can’t do it, they can’t ask for more time and they don’t know what’s going on or what to do. Them coming off and going to the high school, it’s a totally different big thing.

The youth also talked about needing help with safety. The youth from an isolated First Nation community, although had many good things to say about their community also knew that it was “not really really 100% safe over here” (Asinnapis). For instance, Asinnapis talked about the gang activity on reserve and stated, “they steal, they rape, they beat each other up”. The youth all spoke of wanting to feel safer. The Winnipeg youth also spoke of wanting to feel safer. Martin talked about how he calls the police on his own family sometimes because he does not feel safe. Shania and Martin both discussed their lack of trust in the police and how they wished there was a way for Indigenous youth to feel safer.

Feeling stuck or feeling alone were also issues the youth talked about wanting help with. Kira stated that she wants to know “how it is over there” meaning in Winnipeg. She wants to leave the reserve and to live in the city whereas Asinnapis talked about feeling stuck in Winnipeg when she went there briefly for school. She talked about drinking alcohol while she was in Winnipeg so that she could get kicked out of the school and go back home: “after my first drink I just couldn’t stop. Until it got to the point where I wanted to go home so I just kept overdoing it. I wanted to go home”. Similarly many youth talked about feeling alone at times in their lives. Shania talked about being the only Indigenous member on a board of directors stating “all of them are like Caucasian and then there’s me” and Jasmine revealed her past suicide ideation as linked to feeling alone:

I’m a survivor of suicide, I’ve attempted a number of times and a lot of it was because I didn’t know who I was and I didn’t find a lot of supports where I was and so it was just “if I’m alone then I’ll just go alone”. It’s hard to talk about but it should be talked about because no one understands how hard it is to be alone.
Finally youth also discussed wanting help with practical issues in particular help with housing. Caprice talked about how the youth in her remote community “struggle to get an apartment…struggle to get a license” and Martin, a youth living in Winnipeg stated that he is also “struggling to get a house for me and my girlfriend and daughter”.

The youth spoke of many different types of helpers including: guidance counsellors, teachers, mental health workers, counsellors, dentists, police officers, youth workers, child welfare workers, and nurses. The youth also extensively talked about the ways that these helpers had been helpful to them or their community. The participants made some statements of specific helpers showing overall helpfulness. For instance, Kira stated “I wouldn’t make it this far if it wasn’t for them” regarding the helpers she has encountered. Martin talked about how youth workers at the drop in centres he has attended have been “so easy” to interact with and that he still appreciates their friendship even though he has now aged out of the centres. Despite the youth feeling an overall sense of support from many helpers, there were two categories that emerged from the data describing how helpers helped: (1) with education, and (2) with an inherent respect for Indigenous culture/experience.

**(1) Helpers Help with Education**

Many of the youth spoke very highly of some of their teachers. Kira said that if it were not for the encouragement she received from teachers that she probably would not have graduated high school. Jasmine talked about how some of her teachers encouraged her to attend post-secondary education and that she was now attending the University of Winnipeg because of their belief in her abilities. Carson also spoke of the important role teachers had in pushing him to get better marks:

One teacher said “Carson, what are you going to do? I know you’re smart, I know you can do this, I know you’re not a dumb person. Like, look it, you can write this, you only
wrote half of it and you got 50%, 40%, 45%, if you finish to think you would’ve got more.”

Martin said that his teachers were a source of support for him stating, “they’ve been pretty much there for [me] the whole time I was growing up”. Carson also talked about the supportive role that some of his teachers had in his life when he was going through a rough time:

I remember this one time, this is when my mom and dad were splitting and I was having trouble going to school because my mom went out binging and drinking and she was gone for like 3 or 4 days at a time. I was just, I was already the age of 16 or 17 and she’d take off Thursday, I wouldn’t see her, she’d be in the city, in Winnipeg drinking and she’d be gone like the whole weekend. I wouldn’t hear from her. I try text messaging her and she wouldn’t respond. And I couldn’t go to school sometimes, it didn’t happen all the time but it did happen. And I couldn’t finish school at the time anyways but my teachers did support, you know.

(2) Helpers Respectful & Inclusive of Indigenous Cultures

Another key theme that emerged from the interviews was the need for helpers to be respectful and inclusive of Indigenous cultures. The youth talked about non-Indigenous helpers becoming involved in Indigenous cultures and that being much appreciated. For instance, in regards to the nurses in an isolated First Nation community Asinnapis said, “they cook for the elders, they provide activities, they’re really nice”. Caprice spoke of when she was involved with mental health workers in Winnipeg and how they would provide her with beads and do beadwork with her, she stated that this helped her to feel more “comfortable”. Finally Carson discussed one of his favourite teachers:

This teacher was really nice she was my grade 7 teacher and she really enjoyed our, really loved our culture. She was always saying, when we had art, “what would you draw? Is that like a spirit?” She was always hands on and talking. She was a really nice woman and I always handed in everything for my classes for her.

I also had interesting conversations with the youth in regards to whether or not a helper needed to be Indigenous in order for them to effectively help Indigenous youth. At first Jeff said, “it doesn’t really matter to me who’s helping me” but then he later revealed that he did feel more
comfortable with Indigenous helpers: “because she’s part of First Nations I can just tell her whatever I want. But if it’s a different coloured person I’d probably be uncomfortable”. Shania had a similar thought pattern; initially she stated:

I guess it doesn’t, it doesn’t really affect me how I live as a person I guess whether they’re Indigenous or not because everyone has talents and skills and yeah if they could help me they could help me. Like I’m not going to be like, “no I don’t want your help because you’re not Indigenous.”

However, later she acknowledged that she wishes that she had more Indigenous teachers, guidance counsellors, and mentors growing up:

Even having Indigenous mentors, I didn’t really have that so I kind of learned my culture I guess from non-Indigenous people. And I guess when you put those two together it doesn’t really go together. So it would be really nice to have like Indigenous mentors because even now like I still don’t know everything about who I am as a person.

Jasmine compared the Winnipeg Boys and Girls Club with the Niji Mahkwa Boys and Girls Club and stated that the staff at the Niji Mahkwa Boys and Girls Club made her feel more comfortable because they were Indigenous staff:

I noticed a difference when I went to Boys and Girls Club in Niji Mahkwa because it was ran by Native people. And it wasn’t because they were Native it was just because they knew how to talk to me, you know? They knew how to communicate to me that wasn’t super like invasive.

Carson also talked about feeling comfortable in a school in the city not because the staff were Indigenous but because there was such a large population of Indigenous youth at this particular school. He said that because Indigenous youth made up such a big proportion that the teachers had learned how to communicate with them: “they’re all supportive and I think that’s because we had a big base of people, Indigenous people” he said.

**Unhelpful Helpers**

The interviewed youth told me story after story of when various types of helpers had not been helpful or had even been harmful in their actions or lack thereof. When I was reading these
stories I noted three major themes that emerged: (1) helpers that were invasive, (2) helpers that did not listen, and (3) helpers who actively treated youth differently, in other words, helpers who were racist.

(1) Invasive Helpers

Many of the youth told stories about when helpers they encountered crossed the line and became invasive and/or violated the privacy of the participant or of the participant’s community. For instance, Kira spoke of her experience with a school guidance counsellor: “she was always in our face asking us what’s wrong just every hour checking up on us, every half an hour…she used to say out loud about our health problems too. In front of everyone”. Asinnapis also talked about feeling invaded by teachers: “It seemed like they were making me do things that I wasn’t comfortable with…like they made me stand up in front of the class and they would never let me sit down until I talked. I would stand there in front of that whole class just being stared at”. Jasmine shared a story about a teacher who made her feel invaded by going over-board with encouragement:

Or sometimes when teachers over-do it. This one time, I think I was in grade 2, I was in grade 2 and I was like writing little stories and I had like little Native pictures that I found in the story making things so I was writing a story with like the just 6 Native pictures (laughter) that were in the whole story system...So I was writing this story, I probably got to about 10 pages and it was every computer lab I’d write it. Then this teacher was like “wow! You’re doing such a good job! I’m so proud of you! Oh my goodness I can’t wait till you’re done, I’m going to print it out and show it to everybody!” And then I was just like “holy smokes, I don’t want anybody to see this” and I told her that and she was like “no you did such a good job you should be proud of yourself” and she put so much on me that I was shocked you know, because I’m not used to that. I’m not used to doing a good job, I’m not used to doing something amazing you know? So I just quit. I stopped making it, I didn’t do it no more.

This feeling of being invaded did not just occur in schools with teachers but occurred with other types of helpers as well. Jasmine also spoke of it happening in the hospital after she gave birth to her son in conversation with one of the nurses:
She said “well how are you going to carry him around? Are you going to use a car seat? Do you have a car seat?” I said, “I’m going to buy one” and she said, “oh you really need to buy one of those. Don’t use one of those big wood board things with the bag” and I was like, “a moss bag?” and she was like, “no the ones with the boards that keeps the baby flat” and I was like, “a cradle board?” and she was like, “yeah those things, they wreck your kids legs, don’t put your kid in there. This one kid he came in bow-legged, he was born, he had straight legs and he came back he was bow-legged because they put him in those moss bag things that had no structure then they put him in those cradle boards that had too much structure and the kid couldn’t move his legs around. Just don’t put them in there. There’s also a woman who got her kid taken away because she put her kids in there.” I was like “what?” So I just listened to it and I was just thinking “man this is a lady who is taking care of my baby, she works at the Heath Science Centre where there’s a large population of Native women there and I’m like, how many Native women got this lecture, you know?” It was really like frustrating to me and it’s just I get super questioned and super asked like everything.

Martin talked about his experience calling the police on his two brothers who were being violent. He was asked, “in those situations when the cops weren’t helpful, what was it that they were doing that wasn’t helpful?” and he responded, “snooping the place”. Jeff also spoke of a helper who crossed the line when he revealed his community’s experience with a dentist who had come in from Winnipeg:

She was trying to help us…but she saw how dirty our community was and she took a picture without our permission…it was really messy and she posted it on [social media] …so she decided to donate us garbage bags so we can clean up our rez…It went viral.

In general the participants discussed how helpers asked too many questions and made them feel uncomfortable or worse. Jasmine relayed an experience she had at Boys and Girls Club with a youth worker:

You know when they ask you questions like, “how are you, how are you at home, where is your dad, how come he sends you to Boys and Girls club?” like that’s what they asked me at Boys and Girls Club downtown. They said like, “well how come your sisters don’t come anymore? What happened?” You know like they assume that something happened when my sisters just didn’t like the program.

(2) Helpers Who Do Not Listen or Intervene
The interviewed youth also talked about situations when they would reach out for help and when they did not receive the assistance they were hoping for. In particular youth spoke of mental health workers and counsellors that had really let them down. For instance, Jasmine revealed that when she was feeling suicidal. She said, “[I] reached out to my high school counsellors and they just brushed off things like it was nothing, you’re just overreacting”. Kira told about her experience in the hospital after experiencing a mental health crisis: “She just prescribed me pills after I told her everything about me.” Caprice also talked about being given pills for a mental health issue when she really just wanted someone to talk to: “They forced me to take this pill and told me to stay calm and I didn’t want it”. Caprice said that the mental health workers from the city did not take the time to understand her: “It was hard for me to speak English and stuff like that because I speak our language and they wouldn’t understand me”. Carson also shared about a negative experience with a counsellor he opened up to:

I didn’t like my counsellor actually in that high school. When my parents broke up he said to me, “one thing you can do is keep coming to school and hopefully you’ll pass and graduate and you could probably do whatever you want”. But he didn’t understand the circumstances I was under and he kind of just sent me on my way. I broke down and I told him what was going on, I was crying and I was frustrated and he didn’t show no support whatsoever.

The youth participants also discussed how teachers did not pay enough attention to them especially when they were dealing with racism at school. Jasmine shared two stories of this happening one in which a teacher ignored a rumour going around the school that Jasmine would steal things and another in which one of Jasmine’s peers was being racist to her in art class. She said, “the art teacher saw this, like she saw the way he treated me and she never said anything”. Finally, Martin noted that the high turn around of staff at youth drop in centres made it difficult to build relationships and get the help that he wanted from them:
There’d be different workers that at different years so like it’s good to like introduce yourself to the new ones that come to the community to see if it’s interesting to like continue the work because like I think it was [name omitted] that was one of them who worked for maybe like two months and then went to a different location.

(3) Racist Helpers

Every interviewed youth talked about experiences that they had when helpers had treated them “differently” because they were Indigenous. Shania talked about being recruited for a board of organizations and felt like she was only recruited because she was Indigenous: “I’m being put on the spot, or making it feel like I’m different,” she said. Asinnapis, Carson, and Jasmine all spoke of being “treated differently” when they transferred schools from reserve to the city. Jasmine spoke of her own observations that she made of students coming off of the reserve and attending university:

It was really hard for them and I felt really bad for them because I grew up being in these schools and I was used to it so I helped them navigate around and but it was the emotional part that I couldn’t help them with. Being scared, and the teachers treating them differently and they noticed.

There were also incidents that came out in conversation about helpers assuming that youth had been abused when that was not the case. For instance, Jasmine talked about writing a story in high school about a young girl who was abused on a residential school:

I started writing about a girl that survived residential school that was touched. So I started writing that in high school and then they found it in my account and then they called my dad and said “if your daughter keeps writing stories and stuff like this she’s going to be taken away from CFS because you can’t prove you’re not sexually abusing your daughter”. And so that was a negative thing again with the writing and so I just stopped.

Shania had a similar experience being questioned by child welfare workers:

When my sister died by suicide we took her sons in and they’re still in a permanent ward so the adoption process is really long and it’s really slow and so it could be like for the stupidest reasons because one of the workers can be like, “if you don’t fix this we’re going to take them away”. And it can be as simple as one of them missing school for a doctor’s appointment and not bringing the doctor’s note in. It’s really stupid reasons.
Shania also talked about police brutality and youth workers at a drop-in centre as being harmful in the way that they “helped”:

Like my brother and his friend, his friend is non-indigenous, so he’s Caucasian and the way that they were both handcuffed and put into the car it was a lot different. Like they were a lot more careful with the Caucasian boy and they were really rough with my brother and they kept pushing him up against the car and he wasn’t really resisting anything.

It was like a Christian drop-in… But like she looked at me and she started kind of explaining to everyone in a big group that the way Indigenous people, their culture, their smudging, their sundances, their looking at earth as mother earth and not as God creating earth, she kind of said that in front of everyone then everyone just kept looking at me throughout the whole evening. So it was really uncomfortable.

Shania also talked about how teachers made assumptions about her cultural knowledge based on the fact that she is an Indigenous youth. She explained how in her Indigenous Studies class in high school she was frequently called on by the teacher for validation or to answer questions that she did not even know the answers to:

Especially if you don’t know your own culture already. Like I was asked “what’s a sweat lodge” and I was like, “I don’t know”. And that also made it really awkward because everyone was depending on me to give an answer what a sweat lodge was.

Jasmine spoke of having a similar experience in university. She said that “some profs know me as a ‘go to’ person when it comes to a Native question”. Her issue with this was seeing how it seemingly set a precedent that all Indigenous youth know the answers to these questions:

It gives the profs the idea that all Native students are familiar with their culture and so this one girl she got called on and she was just, she was bawling her eyes out, she said “she always looks at me when she asks a Native question and I don’t know what to do” and I felt bad for her because I was like, did I make that plate for her, you know, by always answering the Indigenous questions.

What Helpers Should Do Differently

Although the interviewed youth had many stories of times when helpers had not been helpful, they did have their own ideas of what helpers can and should do differently to meet the
needs of Indigenous youth. These suggestions can be divided into three major categories: (1) the need for Indigenous youth to be given space from helpers, (2) the need for Indigenous youth to feel comfortable with helpers by incorporating elements of Indigenous culture, and (3) the need for Indigenous youth to feel safe with helpers.

(1) Give Indigenous Youth Space

While examining the interviews I did note that the interviewed youth did believe that it was important for helpers to reach out to Indigenous youth. Kira stated that the best way for a helper to earn the trust of an Indigenous youth is simply to “talk to them more” and Jasmine said in regards to non-Indigenous helpers, “non-Indigenous people need to know that when we’re not reaching out that’s when you need to talk to them and you need to reach out and you need to say something because that’s when we just give up”. However, the participants also talked quite a bit about how helpers need to back off more and give them space to allow the relationship to develop.

For instance, Caprice talked about how, instead of giving her pills, she wished that her mental health worker would have allowed her to “go for a walk or watch TV or something”, in other words, given her some space to deal with her emotions. While Carson spoke of helpers in after school programs needing to give the Indigenous youth participants more space and not ask so many questions:

It’s fun when you can go to an after school program and go hang out. More or less it has to do with the programmers, they have to be more fun and it gets kind of, I found that it gets kind of stressful when they come and ask you, “hey how you doing, what you doing, who are you” and it can kind of get awkward [to talk] about what you’re doing, who you are.
Jasmine agreed with Carson’s sentiments and talked about how Indigenous helpers at an Indigenous youth drop-in centre would give her more space. She said, “I wasn’t questioned and it was always like, I was really happy there”.

Jasmine also spoke of how teachers need to give their Indigenous students more space. She especially spoke of this in relation to the over the top praise she received in elementary school when writing a story about Indigenous children. She stated:

I was probably half-way through what I thought was going to be a book and she totally put me on the spot and she would tell all the students “come and look” and it was kind of like just let me have my own space and let me do what I’m doing so that way, because I don’t even know what I’m doing, I don’t even know what I’m making, I’m just trying something out and if you’re going to either negative it or keep things overly positive then I’m, when you’re not used to it then it’s just well, I’m going to stay away from you. It’s uncomfortable.

Shania talked about teachers needing to back off as well and said that especially in Indigenous studies classes teachers should learn the material and not rely on Indigenous students to teach the rest of the class. When asked what teachers should do differently Shania said, “not looking for approval from a student when you’re the teacher when you’re teaching an Indigenous Studies class because like you’re getting paid to do the work”.

(2) Increase the Comfort Level for Indigenous Youth Through Culture

The interviewed youth also gave plenty of suggestions on different things helpers can do to increase the comfort level of Indigenous youth. The youth really focused on various cultural activities and traditional foods that helpers should promote. “Make some bannock and tea,” said Asinnapis, “give them tea and bannock, maybe a moose pocket,” said Caprice. Asinnapis talked about having a traditional drumming group or a powwow available for youth and Caprice said that the “Indian twister game” would be a good one for helpers to learn and promote. Shania also spoke of the importance of including Indigenous cultural programming:
Including more kind of programming that could promote the Indigenous culture and help Indigenous youth who aren’t connected to Indigenous culture or not knowing who they are as a person and kind of helping them. Like the organization being the stepping stone for them learning more about who they are as a person and kind of where they come from.

However, the discussion of helpers including Indigenous culture in organizations also had several nuances. Firstly, Shania discussed how it is imperative that activities such as these not be forced on the Indigenous youth (which relates to the first category of needing to give Indigenous youth space):

But also not forcing it on people would be really great. So not forcing people to participate in a drum group or a powwow club kind of giving them the option and making sure that the organization is reminding them that “if you don’t want to do this, there’s no bad vibes between us, it’s up to you, you’re your own person and you can make your decisions”.

Secondly, Carson brought up the issue of having non-Indigenous helpers running Indigenous cultural activities and he spoke specifically of some of the activities that he knew I personally was involved in:

It’s a really touchy subject to go about having somebody white helping…like you took our land already, what more do they want? That’s the thinking. That’s what I personally think they think about. They already lost so much that’s the thing. A lot of activists…we already lost so much, why do they want more? Why do they want culture-wise? And you, as being white and trying to help, you don’t even know what to do because you’ll be criticized whatever you do.

Many of the youth talked about the lack of Indigenous helpers and how they wished that there were more Indigenous social workers, counsellors, youth workers, and other helpers.

(3) Increase Safety

Finally, another aspect the interviewed youth believed helpers could improve upon was in increasing the safety of Indigenous youth. For instance, Jeff talked about how organizations should install security cameras because he did not trust that non-Indigenous people would contact police if they saw an Indigenous person in trouble. He said, “Like they don't even bother
calling the cops. Maybe they’re just too scared. If I was in Winnipeg with a lot of white people I wouldn’t feel comfortable”. Shania also spoke of the police system needing to change in order for Indigenous youth to feel safe. She said, “so what the police could do differently is look more at the crime and not the person” and Martin said in regard to police officers that they should handle domestic disputes differently: “when they arrive, take us to like separate rooms to have like to speak with us what is happening and is there a possible way to stop it”.

The interviewed youth also talked about how helpers can increase emotional safety for Indigenous youth as well. Jasmine spoke of her teachers and school and how they never did much to stop the racism that she faced and how she wished they would have intervened more. Shania also talked about how helpers need to address racism:

Eliminating discrimination and stereotypes and being willing to trust them but also understanding that Indigenous youth often aren’t really given that much trust so it’ll be something that they’ll need to work on I guess would be responsibility and just being more open minded with people especially with Indigenous people because they still have the residential school generational trauma, yeah so kind of having an open mind to that. And realizing that it’s a trauma that’s going to take a really long time to fix and it doesn’t just go away just like that (snaps fingers).

Helpers must find the delicate balance of intervening and reaching out while still ensuring that they are giving Indigenous youth the space they need. The many nuances and complications regarding this were extremely apparent and this is clearly an area where more research needs to be done.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the results of the qualitative interviews with eight Indigenous youth. Four themes, identity, helpful helpers, unhelpful helpers, and what helpers should do differently emerged along with sub-categories in each of the themes. The next chapter will discuss the implications of these themes and will begin to draw some additional conclusions.
Chapter 6: Discussion

The previous chapter outlined the data from the qualitative interviews in terms of four themes: identity, helpful helpers, unhelpful helpers, and what helpers should be doing differently. In this chapter, based on the research from the literature review, my own self reflections, and consultations with a respected Indigenous community member named Adriana I will connect the data from the results chapter and discuss how I believe the theme of identity has a direct impact on the other themes and the experience of being helped and of helping.

Before I delve into this discussion I think it is important to reiterate the point that Stock and Grover (2013) state which is that we, as helpers must construct the issues that Indigenous peoples face as “colonial issues” and not as “Indigenous issues” (p. 631). The interviewed youth spoke of the various issues they and their peers face. I believe these issues are not caused from the individual youths’ struggles but are caused by the colonial system they have grown up in. I believe that it is up to us as helpers within this system to make changes to the way we help Indigenous youth and also to the system itself.

Identity

According to Chandler et al. (2003) identity is an issue for all adolescents. The time of adolescence is a time of great change and a time when many individuals begin to construct their persistent identities (Chandler et al., 2003). Chandler et al. (2003) state that this paradox: the need for change and the need for continuity is one that should be successfully reconciled in adolescence. Indigenous youth in Canada are at a disadvantage when it comes to reconciling this paradox because of the “multifarious worlds” (Brooks et al., 2015, p. 715) many of them find themselves in. Chandler et al.’s (2003) research focuses on Indigenous youth from many different Indigenous communities and aims to uncover why certain Indigenous youth develop a strong
identity and are thus less susceptible to suicide while other Indigenous youth who are not able to form a strong identity due to many colonial factors are much more susceptible to suicide. They discuss how a lack of cultural continuity directly relates to a lack of self-continuity and is one of the main reasons why so many Indigenous youth take their own lives. Chandler et al. (2003) have noted that in Indigenous communities where a strong sense of culture is present the suicide rates for youth are much lower or non-existent.

With each interview, after I had explained my research and reviewed the consent for participation, I asked the youth questions about identity. I decided to start with identity to find out how the youth referred to themselves (such as Indigenous, Aboriginal, First Nations) in order to match their language and to establish trust. Garrett et al. (2014) state that when developing trust with Indigenous participants it is useful to ask the youth where they/their family is from, about intergenerational history, and about their experience of oppression. Secondly, I knew from my previous research that helpers who can aid Indigenous youth in building resilient identities are the most effective (Brooks et al., 2015; Johnston-Goodstar, 2013). Many of the youth that I interviewed, while experiencing some profound struggles, have also been able to construct their own resilient identities. Asking these youth about their identities and how helpers perhaps may have been able to aid them in constructing resilient identities was central to my research question.

**How youth identified themselves**

In the previous chapter I revealed how the interviewed youth identified themselves, the difficulties they experienced from being an Indigenous youth, and their resiliency strategies which have contributed to resilient identity construction. In general the interviewed youth when describing themselves talked about the importance of family, community, culture, and land. The
youth really stressed the importance of community in particular. Shania stated that her community is where she feels a “sense of belonging” and she talked about how her culture directly informs her identity, “to have a tradition that’s very respectful… I’m proud to say when I say ‘I’m Indigenous’ it’s kind of like saying ‘I’m respectful and I’m going to respect you’.”

Indeed, many of the interviewed youth talked about how having access not only to their culture, but also their land has informed their identity in the form of cultural teachings and ceremonies. This is in keeping with concept of Indigenous sovereignty which Johnston-Goodstar (2013) believe is key to dismantling the oppression that so many Indigenous peoples have faced. Johnston-Goodstar (2013) state that Indigenous peoples must have the right to their own culture, language, spirituality, and land. Many researchers (Baskin et al., 2008; Freeman, 2007; Johnston-Goodstar, 2013; Stock & Grover, 2013) have recognized the importance Indigenous peoples place on land-based identities.

When I reflected on my own journey of forming my own land-based identity with the way the interviewed youth talked about their land-based identities I was able to understand more of what Stock and Grover (2013) meant when they stated that the problems Indigenous youth face are unique to what any other youth face “due to the relationship ‘Indigenous issues’ [colonial issues] have to land ownership, displacement, and sovereignty” (p. 631). The lands that are meaningful to me which I reflected on in my self-location statement include Spruce Woods campground and summer camp. In some ways these lands as they once were no longer belong to me in the same way they did when I was growing up. Spruce Woods campground has since flooded and the places I explored as a child are no longer accessible to me; the summer camp where I worked has since been taken over by new management and I no longer feel the same sense of welcome as I used to. These experiences absolutely pale in comparison to the
experiences of the Indigenous youth that I interviewed but I can relate slightly to the experience of land displacement. These youth spoke of being “first” on the land and they talked about how being “first” should have awarded them some sort of respect—like Caprice stated in regards to witnessing racism: “Why would they want to do that? Like I get angry and hurt. Then I just think about, ‘this is our land, we were here first’”.

The struggle of being an Indigenous youth

However, the youth have not been awarded the respect they deserve; every youth interviewed talked about the struggles they have experienced with identity as a result of growing up Indigenous. The youth spoke of personal and systemic encounters of racism and they also talked about the complications associated with living in “multifarious worlds” (Brooks et al., 2015, p. 715). Many of the interviewed youth spoke about racism within the education system—the racism they have personally experienced going to school as well as the racism they have witnessed in the system. This is in keeping with Dumbrill and Green’s (2008) assertion that the education system remains a colonizing weapon of the state. This is a colonial issue that must be rectified in order to help Indigenous youth produce resilient identities.

Many youth talked about their experiences of transitioning from reserve schools to city schools and vice-versa and how this transition was even more difficult because of the differences they observed in these schools. The interviewed youth talked about wanting to remain on the land in their home communities and also wanting to obtain quality education. Unfortunately, what I discovered from analyzing the interviews, having these two experiences at the same time was simply not possible. The colonial issue is that youth either need to give up their land or give up their right to a quality education. In other words, the youth found out that they needed to give
up their land-based identity in order to fit into the Western culture by obtaining a quality Westernized education.

Other youth spoke of colonial issues and racism they have encountered within the justice system. For instance, Jeff stated, “They just rather set up bills if we resist them. They set up a bill right away and then they'll say, ‘you can't fight us because then it's part of our bill if you fight us, you'll be arrested’”. Canada's Indian Act first passed in 1876 and modified many times since still restricts Indigenous people's right to their own land and self-government (Kulchyski, 2007). Another example is Canada's Bill C-45 which aimed to further decrease the sovereignty Indigenous peoples have over their land and was one of the main issues Indigenous peoples protested in the large scale movement Idle No More in the year 2013 (Horton, 2013).

When the interviewed youth talked about the struggles they had in finding their identity many made note of multifarious worlds and reconciling what Subedi and Daza (2008) term “discrepant identities” (p. 5). According to Subedi and Daza (2008) youth that are not from the dominant culture must reconcile a tribal identity and Western identity and that these identities are not dichotomous but are “overlapping and interconnected” (p. 6). This is similar to Chandler et al.’s (2003) claim that identity formation for Indigenous adolescents is considerably more difficult compared to adolescents who identify completely with the dominant culture.

It was in this discussion of multifarious worlds that the youth I interviewed started to talk about suicide. At no point during any of the interviews did I mention suicide or any issues of that nature. However, completely unprompted over half of the interviewed youth talked about their own personal experiences of suicide ideation or their observations of Indigenous youth suicide. For instance, Jeff stated, “maybe that’s why a lot of kids are killing themselves because they’re sick of the same rez” and Carson stated, “I think that’s one of the main causes of suicide because
they [young people] don’t know their community or themselves”. These two quotes side by side really emphasize the challenge that Indigenous youth are faced with. On one hand Indigenous youth want to fit into the mainstream culture and yet on the other hand the importance of community and Indigenous cultural identity cannot be understated.

The respected community member I spoke with, Adriana talked about how many Indigenous people will say, “I’m too brown to be white and too white to be brown” which again highlights the difficulty of embracing and belonging to both cultures. In connecting this colonial issue back to the literature it becomes clear that the youth that are most at risk for suicide due to needing to reconcile an identity in multifarious worlds are the youth that do not even have a choice. For instance, Talaga (2016) noted the inquest that aims to uncover the reasons why Indigenous youth who must leave their communities to attend schools miles away in Canadian cities tend to complete suicide at an alarming rate. Talaga (2016) suggests that this is a systemic colonial issue directly related to identity that must be addressed.

Resilience

Through a review of the literature it became clear that the best way helpers can aid Indigenous youth with struggles such as identity, racism, and navigating multifarious worlds is by helping them to develop resilient identities. McDowell (2015) found from her interviews with Indigenous reserve members that many of the Indigenous youth are in “survival mode” (p. 65) and that their main objective is to simply get through the day. Resilience, according to Kirmayer, Dandeneau, Marshall, Phillips, and Williamson (2011) is the “ability to do well despite adversity” (p. 84). Kirmayer et al. (2011) state that resilience is a fluid process of responding to adversity but also includes changing the adverse environment. Resilience may not only exist in the individual but may also exist in the community or even the culture as well (Kirmayer et al.,
“Survival mode” (McDowell, 2015, p. 65) then may not be a negative part of the lives of Indigenous youth but may actually be reframed as resilience especially when one considers the colonial context these youth are growing up in.

Despite my close relationship with each of the interviewed youth, when I asked them about their experiences of oppression and/or racism every time I felt myself tense up a little. I felt my own discomfort and wondered where it could be coming from. Upon further reflection, I believe this discomfort came from a place of denial. I, as a privileged white woman did not want to believe that my friends had experienced oppression from the very society of which I was a member. I realized that I saw each of them as doing “well” (Kirmayer et al., 2011, p. 84) and indeed when you look at their successes—each of them has graduated high school and most have gone on to pursue post-secondary or employment, all of them are connected to their families and/or communities in some way, and they all seemed to have a pretty clear direction for their lives—one must conclude that this is true. Yet each youth spoke in great detail of the adversity they have dealt with throughout their lives.

I came face-to-face with this discomfort in my interview with Carson. He was talking about how he was able to navigate the transition from urban environments to the reserve and back again. He revealed that one of the strategies he used and continues to use is employing a “white voice” or “white talk” when he is in situations “where [he has] to be smart”. I asked him if he was currently using his “white voice” while I was interviewing him and he laughed and said “yeah!”. Jasmine also discussed with me about how she changes the way she behaves and talks based on whether she is with people from her own culture or people from outside of it. Using a “white voice” is an effective strategy for navigating multifarious worlds and for building a resilient identity though I could not help but feel slightly perturbed that even I, a friend, was
eliciting this “white voice”. It was important for me to realize that white privilege does not disappear even in friendships. Upon further reflection I realized that the very fact that Carson was comfortable enough with me to admit to me that, yes, he was currently accessing a resiliency strategy showed a level of trust in our relationship even though there were still some barriers that I needed to address.

These barriers, I realized, included my very view of resilience. The concept of individual resiliency and whether or not helpers should be helping youth achieve this has been scrutinized and actually caused me to wonder whether or not Carson’s “white voice” was a resiliency strategy or if it was actually an unfortunate outcome of colonization. Do we as helpers promoting resilience actually turn the “problem” onto the individual and away from society? My advisor, Michael Hart (2017) in personal communication with me raised the point that a focus on resilience can have the effect of forcing the oppressed to adapt to oppression, in other words assimilate. For instance, what would Carson have said differently if he had not felt like he needed to use a “white voice” with me?

Once I was able to examine this concept further I realized that while I strove to use Indigenous methodologies and theories to inform my research and I examined my privilege and located myself within the research—no matter what I did I would not be able to rid myself of my “white” worldview when it came to analyzing the research. This was a difficult realization for me to come to and I believe that what I do after this research has been compiled—the praxis portion of my research will be vitally important. I would like to further this conversation with Carson and also continue to examine myself and engage in the ongoing process of decolonizing myself.
Community and cultural resilience also came up when I analyzed the data from the interviews. This was especially true for the youth that I interviewed from an isolated First Nation community. All of the youth from this community had good things to say about their community and each talked about how they can rely on their community. Asinnapis said, “you can just go up to someone and just ask for help and you’ll get it”. In terms of cultural resilience many of the youth talked about the cultural value of “letting things go”. Carson spoke about how letting things go, or “manoo” has been absolutely instrumental to his success today: “Just move on and go past it ‘manoo’ that’s what they say, just move on and let it go…it’s just that one part of your life, it doesn’t control you, and it doesn’t do anything for you, it’s just not important, that one part can go”. All of the youth also talked about cultural activities and ceremonies as being important in strengthening identity.

I found this connection to Indigenous culture and land as key in improving outcomes and a sense of identity for Indigenous youth from looking at the literature as well (Abou et al., 2015; Baskin, 2007; Navia, 2015). Baskin et al. (2008) believe that identity reconstruction based on land connection is so vital since this is precisely what settlers attempted to demolish through colonization. This is what I found too when examining my own self and reflecting with my self-locating statement—the disrespect of Indigenous land directly correlates to the disrespect of Indigenous peoples. The previous research and this research make it clear: We must, as helpers of Indigenous youth be committed to helping youth reconnect with their land and their culture and if we cannot do this or if the individual is unaccepting then perhaps we can start with respecting the land and the culture ourselves.

**Helpful Helpers**
The youth I interviewed discussed the issues that they wanted help with and they discussed the helpers that were helpful in solving these issues. The themes that came out in regards to this were helpers that were encouraging around education and helpers that showed respect of Indigenous culture.

**The colonial issues**

The colonial issues that the interviewed youth brought up that they wanted help with included things like education, safety, feeling alone or stuck, and housing. These colonial issues seem to be consistent with the issues that I found in the literature. According to Brooks et al. (2015) high school graduation rates for Indigenous youth continue to remain the lowest out of any identifiable group in Canada. Brooks et al. (2015) also state that Indigenous youth involvement in the criminal justice system is higher than non-Indigenous youth involvement which speaks to the issue of safety—Indigenous youth are clearly treated unfairly within the Canadian justice system. Indigenous women and girls are also harmed and even killed at alarming rates. According to the National Inquiry of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2017) in the year 2010 there were a total of 1,181 reported missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

The feeling of being alone or stuck, while not prominently featured in the literature can be a symptom of the inadequate living conditions and high child welfare involvement that are imposed on many Indigenous youth (Brooks et al., 2015). However, it is important to note that while the youth who participated in my study had interactions with the child welfare system, none of them grew up as children in the care of the child welfare system. This feeling of being alone or stuck can also be linked to suicide ideation. Jasmine stated, “I’m a survivor of suicide, I’ve attempted a number of times and a lot of it was because I didn’t know who I was and I
didn’t find a lot of supports where I was and so it was just, ‘if I’m alone then I’ll just go alone’”. Homelessness and lack of adequate housing as well as poverty were other issues that I discovered from a review of the literature (Brooks et al., 2015).

When I talked with Adriana, she agreed with these colonial issues and believed that they are relevant issues most Indigenous youth face. I spoke with Adriana two times about my research, the first time was before I had interviewed youth to get her take on the questions I was asking, and the second time was during my data analysis stage to get her perspective on analyses. The first time I spoke with her she predicted that many of the youth would talk about the issues in their communities which was certainly the case.

Helpers that help with Education

Many of the youth that I interviewed spoke quite highly about some of the teachers they had encountered throughout their schooling. Many of them stated that because of the encouragement they received from their teachers they moved on to post-secondary education and others talked about the support the teachers offered them that was outside their role of educator. One of the youth, Martin stated that his teachers have “been pretty much there for [me] the whole time I was growing up”.

Madden (2015) talks about how teachers who are grounded in empathy can be helpful to Indigenous youth. Kirkness and Barnhardt (2001) as well as Madden (2015) states that teachers who work within a system grounded in the “4 R’s” of “respect, relevancy, reciprocity, and responsibility” (p. 1) are the most well-equipped to teach students with an Indigenous background. Madden (2015) believes that there are limits to empathy and discusses how it can create a situation of “victims” and “rescuers” (p. 9) and this certainly came out in the interviews with the youth. While the interviewed youth talked about teachers who were supportive, they
also discussed teachers who took this support too far and in effect made them feel like “victims” which is discussed in the subsequent theme.

Stock and Grover (2013) also discuss the role of teachers with Indigenous youth. They assert that it is impossible for teachers to be neutral and that their own biases will always inform their decisions unless critical attention is paid to them. I argue that the helpful teachers that the youth participants discussed with me seem to have examined their own biases and provided appropriate help to these youth because of it. For instance, Carson talked about how one of his teachers recognized the difficult context of his life and supported him even though he was not able to show up to class consistently. Had this teacher assumed an air of “neutrality” he probably would have dismissed Carson from the class based on his accumulated absences or perhaps even make a racist assumption that Carson was not showing up simply because he did not value education.

I also found when reviewing the literature that teachers who accept and validate Indigenous students are seen as more helpful (Anuik & Gillies, 2012). Anuik and Gillies (2012) state that this way of approaching education provides a pathway to turn “denial into wisdom” (p. 73). This was certainly evident in the interviews with the youth. The youth spoke fondly of teachers who made them believe in their own abilities and encouraged them to do things like apply for post-secondary education.

**Helpers Respectful & Inclusive of Indigenous Cultures**

Many of the youth I interviewed shared examples of times when helpers had been respectful of Indigenous cultures and/or experience and how helpful that gesture was. The youth I interviewed talked about times when non-Indigenous helpers would do things like cook for the elders or provide beads for beadwork and how much they appreciated this inherent display of
cultural respect. Indeed, Garrett et al. (2014) emphasizes how when Indigenous youth are given access to their own culture the intervention has been proven to be more successful.

It was here that it seemed to be appropriate to bring to the discussion whether or not a helper needs to be Indigenous in order to effectively help Indigenous youth. Initially most of the youth I interviewed told me that it did not matter who was helping them and what their cultural background was, however, as the interviews progressed many of the youth did reveal that they feel more comfortable with Indigenous helpers compared to non-Indigenous helpers and that they would be more likely to say more to and seek help from an Indigenous helper. I believe that these disclosures happened more towards the middle of the interviews rather than at the beginning for two reasons: (1) I think the youth and I as a the interviewer felt more comfortable as the interviews progressed, and (2) I believe that asking the youth explicitly about the racism they have experienced brought out some of these reflections. When I discussed this with Adriana she told me that it was not that non-Indigenous helpers are always unhelpful, but that the relationship between Indigenous helpers and Indigenous youth can move forward so much quicker because trust and common understanding from a common culture already exist. Adriana said that the non-Indigenous helper needs to expect to stay in an engagement phase longer before providing interventions compared to the Indigenous helper.

This seems to be in keeping with what I discovered from the literature. For instance, Mussell et al. (2004) discuss how important it is that helping agencies employ Indigenous mentors for Indigenous youth while Aniuk and Gillies (2012) focus on providing tools to non-Indigenous helpers who provide services to Indigenous youth. Aniuk and Gillies (2012) as well as Garrett et al. (2014) state that non-Indigenous helpers must work harder at their relationship
with Indigenous youth taking time to listen to their stories. This is echoed in Jasmine’s statement regarding Indigenous staff at an after-school club:

    I noticed a difference when I went to Boys and Girls Club in Niji Mahkwa because it was ran by Native people. And it wasn’t because they were Native it was just because they knew how to talk to me, you know? They knew how to communicate to me that wasn’t super like invasive.

    Adriana talked about how agencies should try to hire Indigenous helpers but she saw no reason why non-Indigenous helpers could not partner with Indigenous staff to deliver Indigenous cultural programming. Spicer et al. (2012) agree and they state that non-Indigenous agencies should partner with Indigenous ones in order to effectively include aspects of Indigenous culture in interventions. In my self-locating statement I talked about partnering with Jasmine to organize a community powwow. This partnership felt right and respectful and I believe that an emphasis on partnership needs to be included in helping agencies’ mandates.

    This topic of non-Indigenous staff involved in Indigenous cultural programming was one that I was particularly interested in as I often find myself questioning whether or not I, a white woman, should be the one to offer help to Indigenous youth. Anuik and Gillies (2012) believe that non-Indigenous helpers should focus on decolonizing and critically examining themselves before integrating Indigenous content into helping. I think that critically analyzing myself as well as emphasizing the development of a trusting relationship with Indigenous youth has helped me to become a person that could perhaps cook for the elders or provide beads for beadwork; a helper who can integrate Indigenous culture in a respectful way.

**Unhelpful Helpers**

    When I analyzed the data from the interviews with the youth participants I noticed three ways that helpers were particularly unhelpful or in some cases harmful: (1) helpers that were invasive, (2) helpers that did not listen or intervene, and (3) helpers who were racist.
Many of the youth told me stories of times when helpers went too far with helping by asking too many questions or even by excessively encouraging them. They found these helpers to be quite invasive. This is in keeping with the value of non-interference that many Indigenous peoples subscribe to (Garrett et al., 2014). Garrett et al. (2014) believe that service providers who help Indigenous youth must work within this value of non-interference by giving youth more space and allowing a relationship to develop. Adriana also noted that this could be related to a cultural practice of decreased eye contact. Adriana explained that many Indigenous peoples find eye contact to be disrespectful and that in her opinion many Indigenous youth find eye contact by Western service providers to be uncomfortable or invasive.

In my own practice as a community social worker I have experienced this firsthand. In my first year of working as a social worker an Indigenous teenage boy was referred to me for counselling around the death of his uncle. The first time I met with him I started asking questions about his uncle and how losing him was affecting him. When I tried to make a second appointment his caregiver told me that he said he would come as long as I did not talk about his uncle again. Looking back now I realized that I was making the same mistake, the mistake of questioning or being too invasive before a relationship was established, that so many of the helpers of the youth I interviewed talked about made.

Related to being an invasive helper is the caution mentioned earlier in regards to the limits of empathy which can have the effect of creating "rescuers" and "victims" (Madden, 2015, p. 9). For example, Jasmine talked about writing a story in grade two about Indigenous people and how the encouragement she received from her teacher made her feel very uncomfortable to the point where she stopped writing her story. She said, "I was shocked you know, because I'm
not used to that. I'm not used to doing a good job, I'm not used to doing something amazing...So I just quit”. This teacher told Jasmine that she should be proud of her story, she was attempting to encourage Jasmine and show Jasmine empathy, however, the way she went about it actually made Jasmine feel incredibly uncomfortable. This causes me to wonder, was the teacher more concerned with being a "rescuer" than she was with developing genuine, empathic relationships with Indigenous students?

(2) Helpers Who Do Not Listen or Intervene

On the flip side of being too invasive were helpers who did nothing—who did not regard the Indigenous youths’ experience or who did not intervene when they should have. The interviewed youth spoke about this issue especially in regards to mental health workers and counsellors. Specifically mental health workers in the hospital who simply prescribed medication to the interviewed youth who were hoping for more (“she just prescribed me pills after I told her everything about me,” said Kira) and counsellors in the school system, who after hearing the struggles of the interviewed youth, did not offer appropriate support (“I broke down and I told him [counsellor] what was going on, I was crying and I was frustrated and he didn’t show no support whatsoever,” said Carson).

According to Ross (2005), many Indigenous youth want to be thoughtfully engaged in discussions regarding intervention. Kira stated that she wished that non-Indigenous service providers would simply talk to her more. Perhaps the challenge for the non-Indigenous helper is to find the fine balance between invasively asking questions and not asking questions at all. This becomes especially difficult when one considers the colonial context in which many mental health workers and counsellors are employed. Many of these workers are mandated to ask certain questions on intake and others simply do not have the time (or are under the impression that they
do not have the time) to develop the relationship necessary to be an effective helper. However, according to Adriana, an emphasis on relationship-building cannot be understated and as I found when scanning the literature it is through this relationship that we can start to understand where Indigenous youth are coming from and how to best serve them (Allen et al., 2012; Anuik & Gillies, 2012; Baskin et al., 2008; Nissen Curry-Stevens, 2012).

(3) Racist Helpers

The interviewed youth also talked about times that they were treated differently because of their Indigenous identities, times when helpers made racist assumptions, and times when helpers were overtly racist in their actions. Examples of racism within the helping professions were evident in the literature as well particularly in the education system and child welfare system.

The education system is a colonial system and contains colonial issues that must be addressed (Dumbrill & Green, 2008). Hare (2011) argues that educators within this colonial system fail to make learning relevant for Indigenous students because they do not understand Indigenous culture. Madden (2015) states that teachers must critically examine their biases and must especially challenge the racist assumption many have that Indigenous youth do not value education. Clearly the interviews I presented contradict this assumption. Each one of the Indigenous youth participants spoke about the value of education especially the value of quality education. When I asked the youth their thoughts on the lack of available schools on reserves I witnessed them open up and get angry—“that’s sad” said Kira and Asinnapis. Caprice talked vehemently about how the quality of schools on reserve needs to be the same as the quality of schools in the city she said that youth should not be “shipped out”.
Another system that carries inherent racism according to the literature is the child welfare system (Palmater, 2016). While none of the youth I interviewed had grown up in the care of the system, both Jasmine and Shania shared their experience of interacting with it and the racist assumptions that were made about them. For instance, when Jasmine was in high school, after writing a fictional story about a girl who was touched inappropriately while attending a residential school, the assumption was made that Jasmine’s own father must have been sexually abusing her. She shared:

I started writing about a girl that survived residential school that was touched. So I started writing that in high school and then they found it in my account and then they called my dad and said “if your daughter keeps writing stories and stuff like this she’s going to be taken away from CFS [Child and Family Services] because you can’t prove you’re not sexually abusing your daughter”.

Assumptions such as this only serve to further silence survivors of intergenerational trauma and perpetuate the justified fear that many Indigenous youth have of the child welfare system. Shania also had the experience of being questioned by child welfare workers when her family took in her nephew she said what spurred this questioning was “missing school for a doctor’s appointment and not bringing the doctor’s note in”.

One of the Indigenous youth in Navia’s (2015) study spoke of how Indigenous youth in the child welfare system are made “into sources of profit” (p. 58). This reminded me of what Jeff shared in regards to his observations of non-Indigenous people who accept employment in his remote community, “I think that they're just here for the money. Like because they get paid a lot here”. Indigenous youth can end up feeling like commodities when they must interact with non-Indigenous helpers to get the assistance they require. Adriana touched on this colonial issue and talked about how Indigenous youth are exceptional at picking up “genuine vibes”. If a youth does not believe a helper has a “genuine vibe” they may end up determining that the helper is
there simply for the money and may end up feeling like a commodity or “source of profit” (Navia, 2015, p. 58).

Police brutality toward Indigenous youth was another colonial issue that the youth, the literature, and Adriana discussed. The Indigenous youth in Baskin’s (2007) and Navia’s (2015) studies talked about abusive encounters with police and their view that police simply perpetuate colonial violence. Three of the youth that I interviewed had had negative, abusive encounters with police and Jeff, one of the youth from an isolated First Nation community talked about feeling unsafe in Winnipeg due to this issue. The first time I met with Adriana, prior to conducting the interviews she warned me, “you’re going to get a lot of horrible stories about police”. For instance, Shania talked about an abusive encounter she and her younger brother had with police:

I was walking to Sobey’s with my brother and at the time I think I was 14 and he was 12 so we were fairly young and we were walking and these police officers came running towards us. And she has her gun in and the air and she says “put your hands up”. And we’re like “what the heck” and we’re like scared, and we had like my cousin and he was only seven at the time, she told us to put our hands up and sit on the ground. So we put our hands up and sat on the ground and she asked us if we knew this boy I don't remember the name but I guess you could call him Josh maybe. So she asked if I knew this Josh boy and I told them “no I don't know who this is”. She kind of just flat out said “I don't believe you you're lying you know who he is”. I kept trying to explain to her that I didn't know who he was and he must've been somebody visiting from outside of [my community]. So she kind of kept yelling at us and I was only 14 so I was really scared. She ended up taking us home and she kind of twisted the story saying that we were doing something bad and we literally were just going to the store for chips.

Brooks et al. (2015) state that Indigenous youth get more time served for the same crime that a non-Indigenous youth commits, confirmed by the 2016 Canadian census data which revealed that 52% of Indigenous youth were admitted to custody after the court process compared to 58% of non-Indigenous youth who were not admitted to custody (42% were admitted to custody) and received sentences of community supervision or community service
(Statistics Canada, 2016). In the year 2010, 26% of incarcerated youth in Canada were of Indigenous ancestry which is significant as they represent 6% of the Canadian youth population (Brooks et al., 2015) and the trend continues according to the 2016 Canadian census which states that Indigenous youth age 12-17 now represent 7% of the Canadian youth population but account for 33% of youth in the youth criminal justice system (Statistics Canada, 2016). This is something I have seen firsthand in my current social work role as I often find myself working with Indigenous youth who have been incarcerated. When I visit these youth at the Manitoba Youth Centre and I look around I feel sick—almost all of the youth at the jail look Indigenous. I cannot help but agree with Palmater’s (2017) assertion that the care to prison pipeline is this generation’s version of residential school.

What Helpers Should Do Differently

The youth I interviewed all had plenty of suggestions on ways that helpers could serve them better. In general they spoke of: (1) the need for Indigenous youth to be given more space, (2) the need for Indigenous youth to feel comfortable with helpers, and (3) the need for Indigenous youth to feel safe with helpers.

1) Give Indigenous Youth More Space

Going along with the theme of unhelpful helpers who were invasive—the interviewed youth talked about how non-Indigenous helpers should give them more space, build the relationship, and then help them work on the issues they may have—again speaking to the cultural value of non-interference (Garrett et al., 2014). The youth I interviewed talked about helpers who ask too many questions and Adriana believes that a more natural way for helpers to go about getting the information they may require in order to offer assistance is to give the relationship the time it needs. Adriana talked about the importance of not rushing the relationship
and to build the trust that many Indigenous youth are craving. McDowell (2015) found that many Indigenous youth are so fearful of getting help because of the harm that systems have historically caused them. Trust becomes an essential element to the relationship and many of the youth I interviewed spoke to this. For instance, Kira stated in regards to what non-Indigenous helpers should do better to help Indigenous youth, “you have to earn their trust”.

According to Freeman (2007) the best way helpers can build trusting relationships with Indigenous youth is to incorporate cultural practices such as story-telling, relationship-building, and emotional-reasoning into their work. Freeman (2007) states that "storytelling establishes and maintains human relationships" (p. 101). Jeff and Jasmine both spoke of this in the context of their relationships with Indigenous helpers. Jeff said regarding Indigenous helpers, "because she's part of First Nations I can just tell her whatever I want". Jasmine stated that the Indigenous staff she encountered at Niji Mahkwa "knew how to talk to [her]".

Kumsa et al. (2013) talk about how the healing process absolutely needs to include emotions and heart reasoning—the helper cannot be devoid of feelings. Jasmine provided an example which illustrated how heart reasoning changed her life:

At a conference the president of the university heard me speak and so she kind of negotiated with me to go to U of W and I sent in an application and I got in right away and if it wasn’t for her hearing me speak that day and moving everyone at a conference about bullying, because I had a lot of experience with it.

Another somewhat surprising finding was the value the youth I interviewed placed on humour. Carson talked about how Indigenous humour is different from non-Indigenous humour and that a gap can sometimes form because of this. The Indigenous youth in Abou et al.’s (2015) study stated that they wished the social workers who helped them would incorporate more elements of fun and laughter in their interactions. When I talked to Adriana about this she did not seem too surprised and she connected it to genuine relationship-building. “When you can laugh
together or use humour with a person then you know you have a good relationship,” she said. Hart (2002) agrees and he states that humour is, “an indirect nurturing approach that is non-confrontational and non-interfering” and that it is directly linked to relationship-building and healing. According to Garrett et al. (2014) Indigenous humour is often responsible for helping Indigenous youth survive the adversity they face. Indeed, the popular phrase, “Laughter is the shortest distance between two people” uttered by Victor Borge rings true.

2) Increase The Comfort Level of Indigenous Youth Through Culture

Most of the youth I interviewed talked about how they would feel more comfortable going into non-Indigenous organizations if they knew that elements of Indigenous culture would be represented. “Make some bannock and tea” was a suggestion of three of the youth. Other youth talked about including traditional activities, ceremonies, and teachings in mainstream programming. According to the literature, there is evidence that shows that this is effective. Garrett et al. (2014) found that when the mainstream education system incorporated Indigenous culture into their teaching the engagement and academic success of the Indigenous students increased. Spicer et al. (2012) saw similar results when social workers in Indigenous communities consulted with community members and incorporated their suggestions into their practice. Brooks et al. (2015) and Skwarok (2013) emphasize the growing body of research which supports Indigenous youth connecting with their culture and spirituality in order to increase their resilience and pride in their identity. Clearly it is worthwhile for helpers to learn about Indigenous culture and integrate it into their practice.

However, the youth, Adriana, the literature, and I do have some cautions when it comes to non-Indigenous helpers incorporating Indigenous culture into their practice. Helpers need to remember again the reality of multifarious worlds that many Indigenous youth find themselves
In. For instance, Johnston-Goodstar (2013) caution that helpers can use land-based identity and
Indigenous culture as a way to build resilient identities but that helpers must realize this may not
be the only aspect of identity that youth resonate with. One of the Indigenous youth in Navia’s
(2015) study described this beautifully: “To live in this modern society and uphold our native
culture, it is like walking with a moccasin on one foot and a Nike shoe on the other” (p. 83).
Indeed, Indigenous youths’ reluctance to participate in Indigenous culture can best be summed
up by a quote from one of the youth I interviewed, Shania:

But also not forcing it on people would be really great. So not forcing people to
participate in a drum group or a powwow club kind of giving them the option and making
sure that the organization is reminding them that “if you don’t want to do this, there’s no
bad vibes between us, it’s up to you, you’re your own person and you can make your
decisions”.

The other caution has to do with non-Indigenous helpers leading Indigenous cultural
activities. The Winnipeg youth that I interviewed all shared this reluctance. This was a caution
that I was particularly interested in as I am a social worker who can see the value of integrating
culture into practice but I am so unsure of how to do it in a respectful way. Dumbrill and Green
(2008) talk about how whenever white people have tried to be a part of Indigenous land, culture,
communities, etc. that they have taken something away from Indigenous peoples. Dumbrill and
Green (2008) also talk about the importance of building authentic relationships not only with
individual Indigenous peoples but with communities as well. This can be accomplished by
attending community events and meetings and humbly following rather than taking the lead.

This is reflected in the research in the importance of building partnerships with
Indigenous individuals and organizations (Spicer et al., 2012). Adriana also echoed this with her
assertion that organizations who serve an Indigenous population should make an effort to hire
Indigenous staff and that these Indigenous staff can partner with the non-Indigenous staff to help
run cultural programming. Indeed, when I helped Jasmine, an Indigenous woman organize a powwow in the community I worked in at the time it did feel right and authentic—it felt like a partnership. Also, I believe the reason I was able to have authentic conversations with the youth from an isolated First Nation community was because of the effort I had made to get to know the community over a period of years. I attended their bannock festival as well as a community wedding and stayed with a local family each time I came to visit. It may not always be realistic for a helper to spend this much time in relationship-building but I believe the message is clear—as helpers we need to include aspects of Indigenous culture and we need to take our time in building relationships.

3) Increase Safety

Finally, a third category that emerged from the data of the youth’s suggestions on what non-Indigenous helpers could do differently was to increase the physical and emotional safety of Indigenous youth. In regards to police brutality Shania stated that police need to “look at the crime and not the person” a sentiment that was echoed by Martin. Other youth talked about how when they were experiencing blatant racism at school that even the teachers that witnessed it firsthand would not step in. Jeff stated that he feared going to Winnipeg alone because if something were to happen to him he does not believe other people would intervene because he looks Indigenous.

Appearances and biases are crucial for helpers to be mindful of. From the literature we know that agencies that look Indigenous on the outside (have Indigenous art or colours for example) are more welcoming and inviting for Indigenous youth (Baskin, 2007). This is perhaps one way helpers can increase safety. Another important way helpers can increase safety is by being able to recognize and intervene when racism is occurring. Helpers must find the balance
between intervening and giving space, but when blatant racism is occurring the correct response is to intervene. Some of the most difficult stories I heard were when the youth I interviewed told stories that had to do with helpers who did not act when they should have. Jasmine said that when she experienced racism in school "the teachers never intervened".

Cultural safety is a concept that has been gaining traction within the social service industry (Fast, Bertrand, Bertrand, Mitchell, & Ismail-Allouche, 2017). Cultural safety results when helpers are able to reduce the power imbalances between them and Indigenous peoples seeking help (Fast et al., 2017). According to Fast et al. (2017), Indigenous youth require cultural safety to help them construct their identities. One way that helpers can increase cultural safety for Indigenous youth is by increasing their sense of belonging by, for example, ensuring that Indigenous youth have access to groups of other Indigenous youth in a protected space (Fast et al., 2017).

The way the youth I interviewed have constructed their identities and how helpers have helped or failed them as well as what helpers should be doing differently are themes that have informed my discussion. Reflecting on my own self, talking with Adriana, and looking for connections to the literature have strengthened my discussion and have helped me draw conclusions which will be explored further in the following section.

**Conclusion**

When I began this research I was hoping to find out how helpers have been helpful, how they have been unhelpful, and what they can do differently when working with Indigenous youth according to Indigenous youth. I was able to uncover answers to all of these aspects of my research question, however, I was surprised by how the central themes of identity and Indigenous
culture seemed to be persistent throughout my research findings and my discussion. This study has some limitations which I will discuss here as well as opportunities for future research.

In terms of identity, I found that helpers need to spend more time finding out how the youth they are working with define themselves. Helpers must take their time to build a trusting relationship with Indigenous youth and then start to ask them about their struggles with oppression, their resiliency strategies, and how they have reconciled or are perhaps struggling with multifarious worlds. This idea of multifarious worlds, of having a moccasin on one foot and a Nike shoe on the other (Navia, 2015), seems to colour many of the colonial issues Indigenous youth face. Helpers must understand this issue in order to help Indigenous youth reconcile these two worlds—a daunting task for one to do alone. Helpers must realize that the stakes are high—the research shows that youth who are unable to reconcile multifarious worlds have higher incidents of completed suicide (Chandler et al., 2003).

This thesis sheds some light on how helpers can go about helping youth reconcile multifarious worlds and build resilient identities. Incorporating elements of Indigenous culture in the relationship was by far the most important way helpers can help according to the youth I interviewed. Even simply being aware of Indigenous cultural values such as non-interference, “manoo” (letting go), and humour can go a long way in building a relationship with an Indigenous youth. Providing opportunities for youth to engage in cultural activities such as beading, eating traditional foods, and ceremonies can also be helpful for Indigenous youth.

**Study Limitations & Opportunities for Future Research**

A clear limitation within my research is the size of participant group. Since I did in-depth qualitative interviews with only 8 youth it is impossible to generalize my findings to all Indigenous youth in Canada. It is also important to note the differences within the over-arching
group “Indigenous”. There are many tribes and nations within Canada’s Indigenous population and I was only able to represent 3 of them—Oji-Cree, Anishinaabe, and Métis.

This study also focused mostly on the helping relationship on a more micro-level scale, in other words, what individual helpers were doing or not doing that was helpful or not. I believe that future research should also include an analysis of systemic issues particularly within the education system, child welfare system, and justice system. These systems are inherently oppressive and need to change. It would be fascinating to delve more into these systemic issues from the perspective of Indigenous youth to learn what exactly is broken and how Indigenous youth think it can be repaired. While I do believe that building resilient identity with individual Indigenous youth is important, it continues to place the responsibility of change on the youth rather than the colonial systems. We must find ways to change these oppressive systems—a vital opportunity for future research.

I feel an incredible sense of gratitude to the youth who shared their stories and their knowledge with me. It is my goal to tenderly care for these stories and ensure that they are passed on in a respectful way.
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APPENDIX A: RESEARCH QUESTION & INTENT

Research Question and Intent

In Canada Indigenous youth are served by many helpers across various domains such as education, child welfare, and other youth serving agencies. Many of the individuals employed by these agencies are non-Indigenous. I wish to explore with Indigenous youth the question: how non-Indigenous helpers have been helpful and how they have not been helpful or even harmful.

My goal is to explore how Canadian Indigenous youth view non-Indigenous helpers such as educators, social workers, and other youth workers. I wish to explore this often overlooked perspective by learning what Indigenous youth appreciate and find helpful from helpers and what they consider to be harmful or not helpful. I would also like to learn Indigenous youths’ own ideas on what helpers can do to better meet their needs.
APPENDIX B: QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS

1) Who are you? How do you describe yourself, your family, and your community? Do you see yourself as Indigenous? Do you use a different word to describe your Indigeneity?

2) Tell me about your experience of being an Indigenous youth (if the youth chooses to identify themselves with a word other than “Indigenous” that word will be substituted here)? How do you think it is different from being a non-Indigenous youth? How do you think it is the same?

3) Can you tell me about your experience interacting with non-Indigenous helpers like a social worker, teacher, or youth worker? Were they good experiences? Were they negative experiences?

4) When you were interacting with non-Indigenous helpers, what sorts of things did they do that were helpful? What did they do that was not helpful or even harmful? What do you wish they could have done differently?

5) In some reserves in Manitoba and Ontario there are no high schools for youth to go to. Youth must leave their communities if they want to graduate. What do you think about this?

6) Can you tell me about your family’s, community’s, or even your own personal experiences of oppression or racism? How have you, your family, or community overcome this?

7) Do you think that non-Indigenous helpers who have not been helpful were following a policy of their organization that prevented them from doing something more helpful? In other words, do you think they were just following directions of the place where they worked without considering you and your situation?

8) Do you feel comfortable going to places that employ a lot of non-Indigenous helpers like schools or youth rec centres? Why or why not? What should non-Indigenous helpers do to make
you feel more comfortable? Do you think organizations should make sure that there are Indigenous helpers for Indigenous youth? How should they do this?

9) Do you have any other comments or questions?

10) Would you like to use drawing or writing or some other way of communicating?
APPENDIX C: COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Winnipeg

Health Canada, Non-Insured Health Benefits Mental Health Crisis Unit at 1-855-242-3310

Klinic Crisis Lines and Counselling at 204-784-4090

Mobile Crisis Service at 204-940-1781

Shared Care Counsellor- contact a local physician to refer you to a shared care counsellor

YMCA/YWCA Mental Health Services at 204-832-7002

Isolated First Nations Community*

This Community’s Health Authority offers the following services for mental wellness:
  • Holistic Health Services Coordinator
  • Community Wellness Worker
  • Community Prevention Worker
  • Intake Worker
  • Mental Health Worker
  • Solvent Abuse Worker
  • NADAP Counselor
  • Indian Residential School Resolution Health Support Program

Email [omitted for confidentiality] for a staff listing for these positions.

Accessible Rural First Nations Community*

Health Centre main office contact: [phone number omitted for confidentiality]

*Actual community names appeared on the document that the participants received. They have been changed here to protect confidentiality.
APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

Hi (name of participant),

How are you doing these days? I hope you are well. So you probably remember that I’m in school right now and that I am working on my master’s degree. Well that time has come and if you are interested in it, I’d love to have you on board for an interview. I want to be clear though that your participation is completely voluntary.

I would like to ask you about your experience of being Indigenous and what it has liked for you to be helped by non-Indigenous people while you were in school. Basically I want to know what you think of non-Indigenous teachers and non-Indigenous social workers helping out you and other youth in your community. I also want to know if you have stories of being harmed by non-Indigenous teachers and non-Indigenous social workers or if they have ever done things that have not been helpful.

There is no pressure for you to be interviewed though if you don’t want. There will be no hard feelings, I promise. Your participation is completely voluntary and if you decide to not participate I want to assure you that none of the services you currently receive will be affected.

If you do decide to participate here is some information you should know. The interview will take about 1-2 hours. We can do the interview wherever you feel most comfortable or wherever is most convenient for you. I can come to your home, meet you at a place of your choosing, you can come to my home in Winnipeg, or I can book a private office space in Winnipeg for us to meet. I will audio record and/or write down the things that you say (and if you would rather you write down or draw out your responses, rather than talk we can do that too). Later, I will get a copy of what we said and what I recorded to you. I will check with you if what was recorded or what I wrote makes sense to you. You can change things that you say at
any time when I am working on the research. When the results of this research are written up in my thesis all personal identifiers will be removed unless you tell me otherwise.

Let me know what you think and whether or not this is something you would like to do. I hope to hear what you think about participating.

Thanks!

Stephanie Ens,
APPENDIX E: ETHICS APPROVAL

PROTOCOL APPROVAL

TO: Stephanie Ens
Principal Investigator

FROM: Kelley Main, Chair
Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board (PSREB)

Re: Protocol #P2017:075 (HS20987)
“Indigenous Youths’ Experiences with Non-Indigenous Helpers: How they Help and How they Harm”

Effective: July 27, 2017
Expiry: July 27, 2018

Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board (PSREB) has reviewed and approved the above research. PSREB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans.

This approval is subject to the following conditions:
1. Approval is granted only for the research and purposes described in the application.
2. Any modification to the research must be submitted to PSREB for approval before implementation.
3. Any deviations to the research or adverse events must be submitted to PSREB as soon as possible.
4. This approval is valid for one year only and a Renewal Request must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date.
5. A Study Closure form must be submitted to PSREB when the research is complete or terminated.
6. The University of Manitoba may request to review research documentation from this project to demonstrate compliance with this approved protocol and the University of Manitoba Ethics of Research Involving Humans.

Funded Protocols:
- Please mail/e-mail a copy of this Approval, identifying the related UM Project Number, to the Research Grants Officer in ORS.

Research Ethics and Compliance is a part of the Office of the Vice-President (Research and International)
umanitoba.ca/research