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## **‘You Know What You Know’: An Indigenist Methodology with Haudenosaunee Grandmothers**

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### **Abstract**

This paper will reflect upon an Indigenist methodology that was used for a qualitative re-search study with 15 Haudenosaunee grandmothers from the Six Nations community who were caring for their grandchildren on a full-time basis. The guiding Haudenosaunee epistemology and worldviews are highlighted. Furthermore, the processes involved in the preparation, gathering narratives, making meaning and presenting the grandmothers’ stories are reviewed. The teachings and lessons that emerge within this critical reflection are discussed and highlighted as a means of articulating an Indigenist re-search methodology that is centered in Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing.

In this paper I will share my Indigenist methodology, guided by my Haudenosaunee epistemology and worldview, used for my dissertation entitled “Haudenosaunee Grandmothers Caring for their Grandchildren: Bears of our Families and Community.” Throughout this discussion I will highlight teachings that emerged from the re-search process. Many Indigenous communities have experienced re-search as an oppressive and colonial practice and the term evokes negative emotions and distrust (Absolon, 2011; Smith, 2012). Therefore, I employ Absolon’s (2011) terminology of “re-search” in lieu of “research” to denote how we, as Indigenous people, are re-writing or re-storying how we come to know as well as what we know. As part of an overall decolonizing process Indigenous people are beginning to “search again from our own location and to search again using our own ways” (Absolon, 2011, p. 21). Before re-visiting various aspects of my re-search journey, I want to share an incredibly vivid memory from my re-search journey that has remained with me, as it touches all levels of my wholistic being—my spirit, my emotions, and my intellect. This story beautifully captures some pivotal concepts of Indigenist

re-search such as relationality and relational accountability (Wilson, 2008) and represents a powerful teaching moment.

For my doctoral dissertation defense my committee members and I gathered in room at the university where we sat at a u-shaped table. The space was starkly institutional, sterile, intimidating, and far-removed from the personable living rooms and kitchens where I engaged with Haudenosaunee grandmothers. There were several unfamiliar faces at the meeting. I brought food to share- I customarily brought food items to each of my previous dissertation meetings to establish reciprocity, and show gratitude to the individual(s) for sharing their knowledge and time. In growing up in an Indigenous community, I have come to learn that for Indigenous peoples, food is a means of bringing people together and establishing relationships and relationality. Nonetheless, the process was very time limited and formal allowing us only to briefly introduce ourselves. There was a Defense Chairperson present at the meeting to ensure that the process followed a pre-established format and remained in a predetermined timeframe. When I gazed around at the academic persons present my spiritual intuition gently tugged at my soul, making me consciously aware that the Haudenosaunee grandmothers, whose knowledge and stories were being presented, were absent. I critically questioned why I wasn't sharing the re-search with them and gaining their final approval.

As my defense was nearing the end, I felt relieved that there was general approval for my re-search from the academics who were present. However, an unexpected question came from an Indigenous faculty member on my committee, Dr. Kathy Absolon-King (now a dear friend and colleague). Kathy gently and profoundly asked, "Is there anything that is NOT captured in the written document produced?" I was utterly unprepared for this type of personal, reflexive question that was emotional and spiritual in nature, as typically the focus is on the mental/intellectual aspect of knowledge construction within the Euro-Western academic setting. After a pause, my answer instinctively came to me. Immediately and uncontrollably, my eyes swelled with tears as I began to speak from my heart/spirit expressing the following:

The hugs - all of the hugs and the love that I have for my grandmother who has journeyed to spirit world a few months ago isn't written down! Her love, hugs, and spirit kept me engaged and committed to this project throughout moments when I doubted its relevance or felt like giving up. During these uncertain times, I would visit my grandmother and her hugs and her spirit reminded me why I was doing this project. Although she was unable to verbally express her thoughts (she had dementia), her spirit gently and lovingly encouraged me to keep on my journey. Deep within my spirit, I knew that her story as well as the stories

of other strong grandmother nurturers and leaders need to be told and that I *needed* to share their stories. I somehow felt like it was *my responsibility*. Grandma's spirit was with me all the way through this project and so I'm not entirely sure how you meaningfully convey this spiritual and heart-felt knowledge in a written format—maybe you can't. So, this is more than a dissertation to me- it's a part of me.

This experience allowed me to fully grasp how my Haudenosaunee epistemology and wholistic ways of knowing (from the heart, mind, spirit, body) were tightly woven into the fabric of my methodology.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, it enabled me to envision how I can more actively center and engage my Haudenosaunee knowledge. Within the literature, Indigenous re-searchers have increasingly begun to articulate Indigenous methodologies (Absolon, 2011; Baskin, 2010, 2016; Coburn, 2013; Hart, 2007, 2009, 2010; Kovach, 2009, 2015; Lavallée, 2009; Lee, 2009; Loppie, 2007; Smith, 1999, 2012; Wilson, 2008), but there is less written about how our methodologies are actualized. As Indigenous re-searchers, it is important to reflect upon our methodologies- reflection is inherently how we come to know. For Indigenous peoples, locating ourselves within our re-search is an important aspect our process (Absolon, 2011; Green, 2009; Hart, 2007, 2009; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). Therefore, this is where I will begin in discussing my methodology.

## LOCATING MYSELF AND REFLEXIVITY

Locating oneself within the re-search functions as a means of off-setting the unbalanced scholarship written about Indigenous people by non-Indigenous people (Absolon & Willet, 2005; Smith, 1999, 2012). In addition, it demonstrates the genealogy of our knowledge, allowing others to decide if the knowledge being presented is applicable to them (Absolon & Willet, 2005). From a relational standpoint, Indigenous re-searchers bring their subjectivity (our values, beliefs, and experiences) and positionality in all aspects of the re-search process (Baskin, 2016; Hart, 2009). As a re-searcher, it was important for me to locate myself within the re-search to both the Haudenosaunee grandmothers and to those who read the written manuscript. Wilson (2008) states that Indigenous re-search paradigms require a wholistic transmission of information, "When listeners know where the storyteller [re-searcher] is coming from and how the story fits into the storyteller's life, it makes the absorption of the knowledge much easier" (p. 32).

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<sup>1</sup> Cyndy Baskin (2016) states that while holistic and wholistic have the same meaning within the dictionary and thesaurus, she uses the latter spelling. Baskin believes that it highlights the concept that a whole system of beliefs needs to be taken into consideration versus individual aspects. In accordance with this rationale, I have adapted this spelling in my work.

I am a Mohawk woman from the Turtle clan from the Six Nations of the Grand River Territory, near Brantford, Ontario. I resided in the Six Nations community with my mother, father, and older sister until I pursued post-secondary studies. Currently, I live in Brantford with my husband and -ten year old son, but I continue to remain connected with my Six Nations community on personal and professional levels. I have a therapy practice in my community where I help individuals on their healing journeys.

I grew up living next to my maternal grandparents. I considered their home as somewhat of an extension of our home, as we would freely run across the field to eat or play there. My grandmother provided extensive care for my sister and me, assuming a secondary caregiver role. She cared for my cousin on a full-time basis until he reached the age of five. I was not raised with explicit teachings of our Haudenosaunee ways of life while I was growing up as my sister and I went to a Christian school in Brantford. My parents had the best intentions for us as they strongly believed that the non-Indigenous academic institution would provide us with a “superior education” and more “proper” values than the Six Nations academic system. These colonial ideologies, upholding the superiority of Euro-Western education, were steeped into our collective thinking through the guileful processes of the residential school system. Although my parents were not attendees of the residential school, both my maternal and paternal grandparents attended the residential school in Brantford. The school was commonly referred to as the “mush hole” in my community since the children were punished if they did not eat their oatmeal that was often long past the expiration date. My darker-toned complexion made me a visible minority within a dominant Euro-Western school environment where there were no other children who resembled me, reminding me that I was Haudenosaunee. It was not until I entered my post-secondary studies that I learned how colonialization devalues and dismisses Indigenous knowledges and I began to embrace my Haudenosaunee ways.

Like so many Indigenous people, I am in the arduous process of unravelling the colonial mentality that is firmly embedded within my psyche (Smith, 1999, 2012). I have had to be gentle with myself, acknowledging what I do not know about my Haudenosaunee ways without feeling shameful. Simpson (2011) situates the shame that Indigenous peoples carry within the confines of colonialism,

We [Indigenous people] have done nothing wrong...I placed shame as an insidious and infectious part of the cognitive imperialism that was aimed at convincing us that we were a weak and defeated people, and that there was no point in resisting or resurging” (p.14).

Absolon (2011) offers a similar sentiment as she writes:

“You don’t know what you don’t know” is a phrase I find myself repeating over and over. What I mean is that colonization has attempted to eradicate every aspect of who we are. Colonizing knowledge dominates, ignorance prevails, and we internalize how and who the colonizer wants us to be. Seeking my own truth meant opening up all aspects of my being to seeing what I missed and acknowledging that “I don’t know what I don’t know” (p.19).

While I am learning more about my Haudenosaunee ways and knowledge, I have been graciously gifted Anishinabek cultural teachings and opportunities to participate in ceremonies by knowledge keepers who have come into my life. The process of decolonizing and Indigenizing is a conscious and necessary part of our journey as Indigenous people. Decolonization can be viewed as the process of reclaiming our cultures and knowledges (Simpson, 2011). As such, I view my Indigenist re-search as a political act of resistance and decolonization. Simpson (2011) explains how centering our Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and seeing is inherently an act of resistance and decolonization:

When resistance is defined solely as large-scaled political mobilization, we miss much of what has kept our languages, cultures, and systems of governance alive. We have those things today because our Ancestors often acted within the family unit to physically survive, to pass on what they could to their children, to occupy and use our lands as we had. This, in and of itself, tells me a lot about how to build Indigenous renaissance and resurgence (p. 16).

Regenerating Indigenous ways of knowing and re-searching requires Indigenous researchers to interrogate the colonialism entrenched within re-search (Absolon & Willet, 2005; Simpson, 2011; Smith, 2012). In regenerating our traditional knowledges, we must center our Indigenous knowledges. One way of accessing these knowledges is by searching within our spirits, that inner space, for ancestral knowledge, known as “blood memory” (Ermine, 1995; Hampton, 1995). Blood memory is the concept that we carry visceral memories in our genetic connections to the ancestral knowledge that can be accessed through undergoing an inner journey (Ermine, 1995). Hampton (1995) spoke about how central our memory is in informing our practice and practical knowledges.

## **BLOOD MEMORY**

While I am in the process of consciously re-claiming my Haudenosaunee practices, I have come to understand that I carry blood memory and ancestral knowledge that dwells deep within

my inner being. Our ancestors have fiercely protected this knowledge despite colonial attempts to eradicate it. They resisted by surviving and “taking the seeds of our culture and political systems and packing them away” for later generations to plant (Simpson, 2011, p.15). Within Indigenous epistemologies, there is a wide acceptance that ancestral knowledge can be accessed through an inward journey and introspection (Baskin, 2016; Ermine, 1995; Hampton, 1995; Hart 2009, 2010). Through introspection, self-reflection, and prayer (Baskin, 2016; Hampton, 1995; Hart, 2009, 2010), I accessed this ancestral knowledge in my re-search process that was passed on to me through my grandmother and others who came before her. In the following section, I will outline the Haudenosaunee epistemology and worldviews.

### **GUIDING HAUDENOSAUNEE EPISTEMOLOGY AND WORLDVIEWS**

Our epistemology and worldviews emerge throughout the research, “via motivations, critical reflections, engagement with others, and overall research choices” (Kovach, 2009, p. 42). My re-search methodology was guided by Haudenosaunee teachings of the “good mind” and the leadership roles of women that are espoused in the *Kayanaren'ko:wa* (The Great Law). The Great Law of Peace is a governing structure for the Haudenosaunee, upholding the underlying tenet of the “good mind” or the idea of using the mind to “create peace, power and righteousness” (Mohawk, 1986, p. xvii). The concept of peace is understood as a state of mind. Peace defines the way in which we are to carry respect and equality towards all of creation (Barreiro, 2010). Spirituality and respect are critical for the political and social collective welfare of the Haudenosaunee people as well as for the good of all living things (Lyons, 1984). Power is another important tenet, as one is to have the power of a “good mind” (Barreiro, 2010). Having a “good mind” requires one to use reason to question whether his or her intent in doing something is “helpful and loving” and to be open to the Creator’s will (Jacques, 1997, p. 46). It is understood that having a “good mind” can only be attained if one is wholistically balanced and healthy (physically, spiritually, and emotionally) (Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres, 2006). The principle of “righteousness” describes the virtue of living with a “good mind” and incorporating the teachings within the Great Law that include “love, peace, equity, coexistence, cooperation, power, respect, reciprocity, and generosity” (OFIFC, 2006). Within the Great Law, female authority and leadership are formally embedded within social and political life. Clan mothers or matrons serve important leadership roles (Anderson, 2000) as they performed selection

and advisory functions within chieftainship (Shimony, 1994). Therefore, a Haudenosaunee epistemology and worldview formed the lens of how I went about doing my re-search. In the following section, I will discuss the preparedness aspect of my methodology.

## PREPAREDNESS IN RE-SEARCH

Given the centrality of relationships in Indigenist re-search (Wilson, 2008), preparedness is a critical part of the methodological process. Indigenist re-searchers describe various aspects of this ground-work (Absolon, 2011; Hart, 2009; Kovach, 2009; Michell, 2009). One part of preparedness is forming and shaping re-search questions. While I knew that I wanted to focus on the caregiving stories of grandmothers in my community, I was uncertain about what aspects of their stories should be explored. Therefore, I searched the academic literature, gathering the research that pertained to grandparents who cared for their grandchildren on a full-time basis. In doing so I became acutely aware that the re-search focused on the burdens of caregiving. Given that re-search has been conducted *on* Indigenous people (Ball, 2005; Baskin, 2016; Smith, 1999, 2012; Strega & Brown, 2015), their experiences have been viewed from a deficit-based perspective. I was sensitive to how colonialism has contributed to the disproportionate numbers of Indigenous grandmothers caring for their grandchildren as well as how it affects their caregiving experiences. Nevertheless, I was curious about how Indigenous grandmothers manage to care *despite* the oppression that they endure. Similarly, Strega and Brown (2015) promote an anti-oppressive and strength-based lens in approaching re-search questions:

Taking account of historical and present-day relations of domination and subordination in one's research may usefully problematize deficit findings, though from a social justice perspective, we suggest that investigating the strengths and strategies that allow communities and individuals to survive marginalization might make a better contribution. (p. 5)

I informally shared potential re-search questions and methodology with some grandmothers from my Six Nations community to elicit their feedback. These grandmothers were not caring for their grandchildren, but nonetheless, they provided insightful direction and feedback. Following this process, I completed and submitted a re-search ethics review application for the Wilfrid Laurier University Research Ethics Board (REB). I proposed the idea of gathering stories about Haudenosaunee grandmothers' caregiving experiences via conducting semi-structured interviews. I planned to recruit grandmothers to share their stories through my established social

networks in my Six Nations community. I knew some grandmothers who were caring for their grandchildren that I would ask to participate in the re-search as well as if they knew any other grandmothers who were also caring for their grandchildren.

After my proposal was approved by the university REB, I submitted my re-search proposal to the Six Nations Council Research Ethics Committee. The review process of the Six Nations committee was much more time-consuming than the academic one. I waited several months to have my re-search reviewed. The Six Nations Council Research Ethics Committee only met once a month and at the time that I submitted my proposal there was an influx of re-search applications that had to be reviewed, establishing a waiting period. Once my proposal was reviewed, I met in-person with ethics committee. Throughout the meeting, the members of the review board requested that I alter one of my re-search questions, “How do you view your full-time caregiving role within the context of our Haudenosaunee ways of life?” Some of the committee members were grandmothers and these women felt that this question carried an assumption that the full-time caregiving role was a “traditional Haudenosaunee role for grandmothers” when it did not align with neither their understanding of the role nor their personal experiences. I was grateful for their feedback and adjusted my question to reflect a more general inquiry, “What were the motivating factors that led you to care for your grandchildren on a full-time basis?” After making this editorial change, I re-submitted my re-search application with the amendment and after a few weeks, I received approval from the Six Nations Council Ethics Committee to proceed with my re-search.

Several teachings can be drawn from this preparation stage in Indigenist re-search. First, respect is inextricably interwoven into approaching a tribal or Band Council Ethics Board *prior* to an academic or institutional REB; respect inherently shapes the *order* and way in which the re-search process unfolds. Indigenous communities must be able to determine whether projects benefit them and are carried out in ways that are consistent with their needs, understanding, and ethical standards. As in my situation, a tribal ethics re-search board can provide direction in the re-search design and methodology. Second, adhering to ethical protocols, relationality, and involving the community requires *time*. Nonetheless, relationship-building and following ethical protocols are critical aspects of relational accountability. Kovach (2015) speaks to the intrinsic necessity of investing time in relationships with Indigenous communities as well as the value of doing so as she posits:



A relational-based model for research with Indigenous communities is critical on several levels. Philosophically, it honours the cultural value of relationship, it emphasizes people's ability to shape and change their own destiny, and it is respectful. In a relationship-based model, research is a sincere investment in the community. This requires the ability to take time to visit with people (whether or not they are research participants)...While the emphasis on relationship can frustrate timelines and well-charted research designs, the journey is truly amazing. (p. 55)

A relationship-based model is critical for Indigenous methodology. Relationality is an Indigenist imperative at the onset of the re-search journey as well as throughout the entire process of re-search. In the following section, I will discuss how relationality and respect were carried out in the meaning-making of the grandmothers' narratives.

## **GATHERING STORIES**

For the re-search, I gathered the incredibly beautiful stories of strength and resiliency from fifteen Haudenosaunee grandmothers who were caring for their grandchildren on a full-time basis. I borrow Absolon's (2011) terminology of 'gathering' or 'collecting stories' in lieu of the more commonly known term of 'interviewing.' I approached the grandmothers with a "good mind" as I took great care to orally review a consent form that contained some of the following information: what the study was about; how I would gather their stories and make meaning from them; how they would be able to review the dissertation before it was published; how confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained; and how they would obtain access to the final information. I also orally reviewed a question guide with them that I would use to give them an idea of some of the topics that we might touch upon.

After agreeing to participate, I requested the grandmothers to sign the consent form. Once the consent forms were signed, I attended to the ethical protocol of offering them tobacco. I gave the first grandmother that I met with tobacco that was wrapped in a pink cloth since this was what I had readily available; she gifted me with a teaching about how, for our Haudenosaunee people, the colour black represents grandmothers. Indeed, I truly respected these grandmothers as knowledge carriers and thus, out of respect of this woman's knowledge, I subsequently presented the other grandmothers with tobacco that was wrapped in a black cloth. By offering tobacco to each of the grandmothers, I was making a request from my spirit to the spirits of the grandmothers to share and offer their stories with me (Wilson & Restoule, 2010). I was also agreeing to deeply respect their knowledge and make meaning of their stories with a "good mind." Moreover, by

accepting the tobacco, they were providing their informed consent to participate (Baskin, 2016; OFIFC, 2012; Wilson & Restoule, 2010).

In addition to the tobacco, I gave each of the grandmothers an honorarium of \$50. Gift giving is an important protocol espoused in a Haudenosaunee epistemology and worldview as it serves to maintain a balanced, harmonious, reciprocal relationship. I was requesting the grandmothers to offer their valuable stories, time and knowledge, and thus, I was obligated to reciprocate their gifts. Potts and Brown (2015) state, “The term *data* in its origins means ‘gift’...we see data as a gift that participants bestow, and we work to respect those gifts” (p. 27).

Similar with other Indigenous re-searchers, I had preexisting relationships with many of the grandmothers on varying levels (Hart, 2009; Kovach, 2010; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008) due to my layered involvement in the community and multiple roles (i.e., therapist/helper, patron, student, daughter, sister, granddaughter, niece, and/or friend). While I knew several of the grandmothers quite well, there were others who were informed about me through a third party. However, this latter group of grandmothers knew my grandmother; I disclosed that I had an interest in the topic as my grandmother extensively helped in caring for me as a child. These established relationships facilitated trust, allowing the grandmothers to openly share their powerful narratives with me in a way that would not have been possible if we had no previous relationship. Euro-Western re-search methodologies might view my re-search as being biased due to my preestablished relationships and personal sharing in the data collection process. However, from an Indigenist re-search perspective, these relationships and my personal involvement in the community made me feel particularly accountable to the grandmothers, community, and re-search. While I viewed myself as an insider with the grandmothers, the reality is that I remained somewhere between the continuum of insider/outsider as, “Often we [anti-oppressive re-searchers] have a personal connection to the issue of the topic, but we are also usually connected to government, human service, or academic institutions” (Potts & Brown, 2015). Smith (2012) astutely asserts that, as Indigenous re-searchers, our outsider relations are established the moment we align ourselves with re-search. Re-search has oppressed Indigenous peoples in a myriad of ways, and therefore, Indigenous re-searchers must be sensitive and respectful to the reality of how we are perceived by our communities, regardless of how we may view ourselves.

When I gathered the stories, I met the grandmothers at their homes in our Six Nations community (except for two grandmothers who lived in nearby urban areas). While we had focused

discussions, meeting the grandmothers in their kitchens or living rooms made the conversation feel like a natural conversational process. Generally, the grandmothers offered me a coffee, tea, or baked goods and I graciously accepted their offers. I used a question guide that listed some general interview questions. While there were times that I prompted the grandmothers with open-ended questions, they were encouraged to tell their stories in an emergent, meaningful way as a natural conversation would unfold. Each of the grandmothers provided me with their permission to audio-recorded them. The parts of our conversations that were audio-recorded generally took one and half hour to two hours.

During the interviews, the grandmothers passionately spoke about both the rewards and challenges of caring for their grandchildren. Some of them cried when they discussed difficult family issues and challenges in caring. However, they also beamed with love and joy as they spoke about the rewards of caring for their grandchildren. I witnessed their demeanor shift as they confidently discussed how they served an important role of protection and healing within their families and the community. It seems that this re-framing and re-storying process promoted an element of healing for some of the grandmothers; many of them shared that they felt a sense of blame for their care situations (either internally or externally), however this sharing process enabled them to describe their strengths. In Indigenous re-search, meaning is made in the context of the relationship where stories are shared (Wilson, 2008). Smith (2012) contends that the Indigenous re-search agenda encompasses decolonization, transformation, spirituality, and recovery. In reflecting back upon the process of collecting the grandmothers' stories, it becomes apparent that a focus group, in combination with the interviews, may have been used in collecting stories. A focus group discussion might have provided a powerful opportunity for the grandmothers to share their experiences and thereby promote healing and transformation through collectively storytelling. Loppie (2007) found that the use of focus groups encouraged an environment of mutual learning, openness, and support for Mi'kmaq grandmothers to share sensitive stories about their experiences with menopause. Several of the Haudenosaunee grandmothers discussed how they felt that a group for grandmothers in the community would be helpful to discuss their caregiving roles, challenges, and to support each other in their important leadership role in the community.

Although I used the data from the conversations that were audio-recorded to make meaning, the re-search process also occurred within my informal interactions with the

grandchildren. Often the children were present during the interviews and in these cases, I would spend some time talking or playing with them before and/or after the interviews. In some of the interviews, I turned off the audio-recorder while the grandmothers attended to tasks or take care of their grandchildren's needs (e.g., providing meals, change diapers, clean up), allowing me to further interact with the grandchildren. The time that I spent with the grandchildren strengthened my relationship and connection with the grandmothers, and their narratives as well as the children.

While I was gathering stories, I was also making meaning of the narratives and searching for themes as a way of constructing knowledge. I separately describe the process of collecting stories and making meaning, but in practice, they were not distinct phases in my methodology. Instead, these processes simultaneously occurred together in my wholistic methodology. In the following section, I will provide more detail about how I made meaning of the stories.

## MAKING MEANING

The processes of meaning-making and collecting stories were inextricably linked at the onset of data collection. I kept a reflexive journal where I wrote about processes and themes that were revealed and my wholistic (emotional, spiritual, physical, mental) responses. There were certain periods within the meaning making phase where I stepped back from the data to take a break and tend to my wholistic self. This time allowed me to re-focus my thoughts and interpret the stories from a "good mind" and spiritual realm. Cree scholar, Herman Michell (2009), speaks to spiritual and physical space that is created when we put aside the meaning making as he states, "We allow our thinking to digest what we have learned. We experience the *ethical space of spirit becoming physical*" (p.71). Wilson (2008) asserts that in re-search, spiritual connections are not only built within the relationships with humans, but they also formed with the *ideas* and narratives. By honouring and lifting up these relationships and our relational accountability that we have as re-researchers to these relations, Indigenous re-search is a ceremony (Wilson, 2008).

As part of the meaning making process, I hired a non-Indigenous transcriber to transcribe the grandmothers' narratives. I felt that by having someone who was not connected to the community, I was protecting the grandmothers' anonymity and confidentiality. As another means to protect their privacy, I had the transcriber sign an agreement. However, as an outsider, she was unable to fully and accurately capture some of the tones, intentional pauses, and pronunciations in her transcription that would have more closely positioned the grandmothers' stories within the

relational and community context in which they were shared. There were a few instances, wherein I contacted the grandmothers to clarify that I was understanding what they were trying to convey. Moreover, each of the grandmothers was offered the opportunity to review their transcripts to ensure that their words were written accurately as well as to omit anything that they did not want shared. Upon reflection, I realized that a Six Nations transcriber may have more fully grasped some of the slight, cultural nuances within the narratives of the grandmothers (e.g., community terminology, tones, laughter) than someone who was not from the community. Hiring and training an insider would have also increased community collaboration and capacity-building (Baskin, 2016).

My subjectivity and positionality as a re-researcher were explicitly embedded in the meaning making process. My Haudenosaunee epistemology and worldview shaped how I made meaning as I understood the grandmothers as being nurturers and community leaders. Although the women did not directly describe themselves as leaders within the community, they discussed how they viewed themselves as providing healing for their families and community. They also spoke about how they felt that their teachings, guidance, unity, and role modelling were foundational for the health and well-being of the younger generation who represent our future leaders. As a critical re-researcher, I consciously situated the grandmothers' lives and caregiving experiences within colonialism, such as racism, residential schools, and dominant Euro-Western child welfare practices as well as a myriad of assimilative policies and structures. In doing so, it led me to understand the grandmothers' caregiving role as a means of keeping the "state's hands off" their grandchildren and families, viewing them as fierce, resilient protectors. They spoke passionately about protecting their families and community.

## **PRESENTING THE NARRATIVES**

Once there were no new themes that were revealed, I began to search for a framework in which to represent the narratives, and themes into a meaningful presentation. Once again, this process required me to step back from the re-research process and allow my spirit to access an inner knowledge and wisdom. Through walks on the land and prayer, the metaphor of the bear continually came to me and I employed the bear as a metaphor to present the information. Other Indigenous scholars have utilized metaphors to convey complex ideas (Absolon, 2011; Hart, 2007; Michell, 2009). Indigenous people often tell stories using metaphors or visual imagery to provide

the listener with a deeper level of meaning (Simpson, 2011; Wilson, 2008). Using the bear as a metaphorical framework was strategically useful for many reasons. First, the bear is a clan animal for the Haudenosaunee. Members of the bear clan are tasked with the healing functions within society; the grandmothers in the study, indeed, contributed to healing within their families and community. Second, the bear metaphor allowed me to beautifully compare how the grandmothers protected their grandchildren like female bears that protect their cubs in the threat of harm or danger. They fiercely protected their grandchildren when they felt threatened by the state and child welfare system. Third, in describing the behaviours of bears, I could readily discuss the action-based themes that assisted in preserving the meaning of the stories (e.g., “assuming the caring role over time,” “protecting grandchildren from the child welfare system”).

In presenting the stories and meanings in a written format, I extensively used the direct quotations of the grandmothers. I provided some context before and after their narratives as a way of attempting to retain the original meaning. For Indigenous peoples, recording narratives in a written form is a challenging task as the relationship within which the story was contextualized is lost or separated (Wilson, 2008). Moreover, I provided each of the grandmothers a draft of the dissertation and an opportunity to enlist their insight and approval of the way in which the meanings were made and represented. The grandmothers expressed how closely the bear metaphor depicted their experiences. In an Indigenous re-search paradigm, “trustworthiness is about relying on the understandings stemming from people who are living in a way that reflects their understandings, such as Elders” (Hart, 2009, p. 167). In this sense, trustworthiness was established as many of the grandmothers who approved the final project were respected and acknowledged as Elders in my Six Nations community. Furthermore, as an active community member who is closely connected and engaged within it, I maintained relational accountability to the grandmothers as well as to the community to represent the stories in a truthful manner. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, I felt *responsible* to truthfully share the stories of the grandmothers. I held a deep spiritual/emotional connection to the topic due to love and care that I had for my grandmother as well as the grandmothers from my community.

## **CLOSING REFLECTIONS**

Upon reflection of the re-search process, I am taken back to the memory of my doctoral defense that I shared at the beginning of this chapter when I consciously became aware that the

grandmothers were absent in the meeting. I have oftentimes imagined what it would have been like if the grandmothers were present. I wonder about the types of comments and questions they might have posed. I wonder how it would have made them feel to witness their stories, experiences, wisdoms, and knowledges lifted up. I wonder how we would have felt with all of us collectively presenting the re-search. I wonder what it might have been like if the defense was held in our community where the grandmothers' narratives were shared and grounded. Ultimately, I wonder how transformative and healing that it would have been for the Haudenosaunee grandmothers if they witnessed the re-telling of their stories. Throughout the methodology, I missed some pivotal opportunities to more closely engage the grandmothers in the re-search process. However, in moving forward, I will continue this re-search by reuniting with the Haudenosaunee grandmothers to determine how to proceed. While I am uncertain what the re-search process, will look like, it will be driven by these beautiful women.

Importantly, my re-search journey also underscores the need for an, "Indigenous presence within the academy that places value upon Indigenous knowledges, to provide a stewardship role for those knowledges" (Kovach, 2015, p. 50). Although I had an Indigenous faculty member on my dissertation committee, she was only involved in the latter stage of my re-search process as she had just been hired. I often wonder how, with her mentorship throughout the entire process, my methodology may have unfolded. As an Indigenous faculty member at a post-secondary institution, I feel privileged to be in a position to center our Indigenous knowledge in scholarship, re-search, and within the academy, planting and cultivating the seeds of my Haudenosaunee knowledge that have been protected by my ancestors, including my grandmother.

Within this discussion, I have outlined my Haudenosaunee methodology while highlighting teachings from my re-search journey. In being gentle with myself, I am reminded of Absolon's (2011) words, "You don't know what you don't know" (p. 19). It is by opening ourselves up to all aspects ourselves (mind, body, emotions, spirit) and reflecting that we are able to uncover our own truth and learn. Although my dissertation is completed, I continue to be relationally accountable to these beautiful, resilient and strong Haudenosaunee grandmothers. Therefore, I will take my knowledge bundle that is much fuller with the teachings than the onset of this re-search journey and continue to re-search *with* the Haudenosaunee grandmothers.

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