

A FIRST NATION MODEL OF *MISHKAUZIWIN* [STRENGTH; RESILIENCE]:  
THE REVITALIZATION OF FAMILY/CLAN IDENTITY  
IN AN ANISHNAABE FAMILY OF NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO

by

Annie E. Wenger-Nabigon

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of the requirements for the degree of  
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**APPROVED/APPROUVÉ**

Thesis Examiners/Examineurs de thèse:

Dr. Gratien Allaire  
(Supervisor/Directeur de thèse)

Dr. Mary Ann Corbiere  
(Committee member/Membre du comité)

Dr. Cynthia Whissell  
(Committee member/Membre du comité)

Dr. Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux  
(External Examiner/Examineur externe)

Dr. Anne-Marie Mawhiney  
(Internal Examiner/Examineur interne)

Approved for the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
 Approuvé pour la Faculté des études supérieures  
 Dr. David Lesbarrères  
 M. David Lesbarrères  
 Acting Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies  
 Doyen intérimaire, Faculté des études supérieures

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## Abstract

This thesis uses a family-directed approach to study the topic of resilience through an extended Anishnaabe family's perceptions of their *mishkauziwin* [strength; resilience] as they strive to revitalize their family/clan identity. The interdisciplinary/qualitative/indigenist study braids together complementary ways of research from indigenous knowledges and the Western academy in a participatory framework.

The perceptions of participants in studies on resilience are often sidelined, as are aspects of Aboriginal realities often missing from mainstream views of resilience in Aboriginal contexts. The perceptions of research participants in this study are the core-organizing feature of the research as they look at their relationships, traditional practices, and indigenous knowledge. The study contributes significantly to Anishnaabe communities and individuals as well as expands the body of knowledge on the topic of resilience in general. The study examines systemic issues impacting the lived experiences of participants, reviews the topic of historical trauma as it relates to the family participants, inquires into cultural identity issues, and works to comprehend the ecological view in Aboriginal contexts.

The themes, patterns and metaphors of resilience from an Anishnaabe family's perceptions serve to clarify significant findings about *mishkauziwin*, illustrating the process of restoration of family/clan identity as that of a strength based process which carries with it significant protective factors. The work together reaffirmed the value of a knowledge study emerging from the ground up as contrasted with top down approaches.

Some aspects of the revitalization process can be viewed as a grieving process, indicating that *mishkauziwin* means strength for healing and is the impetus for forward movement despite colonization and historical trauma. *Mishkauziwin* is evident in the connections within and between families, in aspects of spirituality, clan roles, cultural traditions, survival, and love. Themes of restoring lost identity through connections to each other and their land, language, and traditional culture are evident. Clan identity and the family revitalization are embedded in these processes, as are other protective factors, such as education, and spiritual and cultural factors, which modulate the effects of loss. This confirms findings of other research on resilience in Aboriginal contexts, and gives direction for future research.

## Keywords

resilience; *mishkauziwin*; Anishnaabe; Aboriginal; indigenous; Indigenous Knowledge (IK); First Nation; family; clan; interdisciplinary; ceremony; spiritual; revitalization; decolonization; indigenist research; strength; family reunion; survival; cultural restoration; historical trauma; human development; relationship; location

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## Table of Contents

Thesis Defense Committee.....	ii
Abstract .....	iii
Acknowledgements .....	v
Table of Contents .....	vi
List of Figures .....	x
List of Appendices .....	xi
Chapter 1 .....	1
1 Introduction of the study.....	1
1.1 Purpose and goals.....	1
1.2 Approach to relevant scholarship and background material .....	2
1.2.1 A note on the literature review .....	4
1.2.2 Adequacy of current resilience concepts in First Nations contexts ...	4
1.3 Definition of terms .....	5
1.4 Methods.....	7
1.4.1 Overview of design.....	8
1.5 Limitations and delimitations.....	11

1.6 Summary .....	12
Chapter 2 .....	14
2 Beginning the journey .....	14
2.1 Locating the researcher .....	15
2.2 Locating the participants .....	23
2.2.1 Anishnaabe clan history .....	30
2.3 Summary .....	42
Chapter 3 .....	44
3 Background of the study .....	44
3.1 A look at the general body of knowledge on resilience .....	44
3.1.1 Risk and protective factors .....	45
3.1.2 Trauma, loss, and adaptation .....	47
3.1.3 The ecological view: community and cultural contexts .....	49
3.1.4 Resilience as process .....	54
3.2 A look at the current body of knowledge on resilience in First Nations contexts .....	56
3.2.1 Historical trauma, survival, and resilience .....	58
3.2.2 Cultural identity issues .....	61

3.2.3	The ecological view in Aboriginal context.....	64
3.2.4	Resilience process vs. recovery, survival, and adaptation processes.....	68
3.3	Systemic issues of studying perceptions of <i>mishkauziwin</i> with an Anishnaabe family .....	69
3.3.1	Language, identity, and culture .....	71
3.4	Summary .....	73
Chapter 4	.....	75
4	The journey in learning together .....	75
4.1	The interdisciplinarity of the study .....	76
4.1.1	Definition of interdisciplinarity .....	77
4.1.2	Complexity of interdisciplinarity.....	79
4.1.3	Conflict and critical interdisciplinarity.....	81
4.1.4	Authority, ambiguity and parallels .....	85
4.1.5	A systems perspective.....	86
4.2	Interdisciplinarity and the Indigenist Approach.....	87
4.3	Indigenist approaches, indigenous knowledge paradigms, and indigenous research .....	91



4.4	The ceremony of research .....	97
4.4.1	Cultural safety issues .....	98
4.4.2	Issues of “otherness” .....	102
4.5	The research design.....	105
4.5.1	The family-directed journey .....	105
4.5.2	Family/clan-centered Modified Grounded Theory .....	107
4.5.3	The pilot project: beginning the journey .....	110
4.6	Procedure of organizing the family journey: process, participant selection, questions .....	115
4.7	Analysis of information gathered.....	116
4.8	Summary .....	119
Chapter 5 .....		120
5	Results of the study.....	120
5.1	Emergent themes, patterns, and metaphors.....	120
5.1.1	<i>Mishkauziwin</i> and family/clan reunions: building relationships, gathering strength .....	137
5.1.2	<i>Mishkauziwin</i> and identity: land, language and tradition .....	149
5.1.3	<i>Mishkauziwin</i> , spirituality, and healing .....	155

5.2	Synthesis and critical analysis: results and previous research on resilience .....	163
5.2.1	Relationship of <i>mishkauziwin</i> to risk and protective factors .....	164
5.2.2	Relationship of <i>mishkauziwin</i> to survival and adaptation.....	166
5.2.3	Relationship of <i>mishkauziwin</i> to resilience.....	169
5.2.4	<i>Mishkauziwin</i> and the future .....	172
5.3	Summary .....	174
Chapter 6	.....	177
6	Discussion: “We’ve never been broken” .....	177
6.1	A First Nation model of resilience as <i>mishkauziwin</i> .....	177
6.1.1	<i>Mishkauziwin</i> and identity:	
	The ceremony of family/clan continuity.....	178
6.1.2	<i>Mishkauziwin</i> and community: An ecological perspective .....	184
6.1.2.1	Mishkauziwin and responsibility: Family/clan role in the Anishnaabe Nation.....	190
6.2	Recommendations:	
	resilience research in indigenous contexts .....	194
6.2.1	Responsibilities of research, researchers, and communities.....	194

6.2.2 Boundaries, borders, and bridges.....	198
6.3 Summary .....	201
7 Conclusion .....	203
7.1 Lighting the Fire.....	205
References .....	209

## List of Figures

Figure 1. The structure of location in our relationships of study, and the multidirectional fluidity of interactions among all parts.....	24
Figure 2. Brief genogram .....	40
Figure 3. Relationships of themes that emerged during the study .....	120

## List of Appendices

Appendix A – Letter of invitation from the family/clan .....	241
Appendix B – Letter of information to the family participants.....	242
Appendix C – Consent/information form.....	244
Appendix D – List of topics for the research Talking Circles/interviews .....	245
Appendix E – Approval for conducting research.....	246

# Chapter 1

## 1 Introduction of the study

This chapter introduces the study of perceptions of *mishkauziwin* [strength; resilience] in an Anishnaabe extended family working on understanding their own revitalization efforts for over 25 years. The focus of the study is on the issue of human resilience from a First Nation perspective. Rather than problematizing the issue, both researcher and family participants enter into a mutual effort to examine the family perceptions of their strength, contributing to knowledge about human resilience for the family as well as for the larger world. The questions that are important to the family guide the direction of the research project from the outset (see Appendix D). The purpose and goals, the approach to relevant scholarship and background material (including literature review), the definitions of terms, and the methodological design (emphasizing underlying ethical requirements) are presented in brief.

### 1.1 Purpose and goals

The purpose of this study is to describe perceptions of *mishkauziwin* within an extended Anishnaabe family from their own viewpoints - focusing on what they say they have done - with the goal to contribute to the greater body of knowledge about human resilience. For over 25 years the desire and will of the family to reconnect drove forward their efforts toward family continuity and identity through restoration of traditional clan affiliation. The originality of their work was not initiated or funded by any government policy or commission, nor sponsored by any First Nation body, but was generated and sustained by the desire of family

members to restore relationships, to know their own strength and volition, and thus extend their identity into the future. Their motivation to further explore what they had learned and gained generated their willingness to partner with the researcher in a formal study.

The clan structure of traditional Anishnaabe peoples was the former foundation of governance and polity of the Nation, and embodies a concept of identity which family members claim as an aspect of their revitalization. The family is motivated to deepen their understandings of their strength as a family/clan in order to transmit their knowledge to future generations of the family as Anishnaabe people with a unique identity.

A primary goal of this study is to use an interdisciplinary/qualitative/indigenist approach to describe a model of resilience emerging from experiences and perceptions of the participants, while endeavoring to avoid evaluation or criticism of various socioeconomic issues or desired outcomes. This participatory model facilitates a respectful engagement with the family as a learning community sharing and generating knowledge in a mutual fashion. A secondary goal of the study is to inform approaches to understanding human resilience within First Nations contexts. The intention is to understand perceptions of mishkauziwin within this family, and describe these understandings in a manner that accurately reflects the family knowledge.

## 1.2 Approach to relevant scholarship and background material

The need for better understandings of human resilience in Aboriginal contexts is evident given contemporary pressing concerns regarding the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal communities. Understanding the strength of Aboriginal communities and families is of crucial

importance for formulation of appropriate policies affecting Aboriginal peoples as the larger Canadian society works to fulfill treaty obligations. These understandings also contribute to the larger body of knowledge on human resilience. The issues surrounding this topic deserve continued research, which contributes to new knowledge, along with confirming what is already known. This study contributes added understanding to family factors that promote human resilience.

Researchers have identified cultural identity and continuity as a significant factor in human resilience. Lalonde's (2003; 2006) work on identity formation and cultural resilience in Aboriginal communities in British Columbia shows the significance of collective efforts to support positive identity development. Although Lalonde is clear that his work "was not intended to be about resilience." (2006, p.52) he is equally clear that the work "addresses issues of resilience at a cultural rather than an individual level" (p.52). Chandler & Lalonde (1998) earlier had addressed the issue of individual and cultural continuity as protective factors in Aboriginal communities with little or no youth suicide.<sup>1</sup> Wesley-Esquimaux & Snowball (2010) write of the need to reclaim the "strengths and values" that "guided our ancestors" (p. 393), factors that are integral to the work of the family. The findings of this study clearly support what these, and other, academics are finding.

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<sup>1</sup>There have been no known suicides in the participating family of this study.



### 1.2.1 A note on the literature review

The review of literature for this study was engaged in following a model usually employed in Grounded Theory Studies. Studies based in a positivist, empirical scientific tradition, and many qualitative studies as well, begin with a review of relevant literature, prior to formulation of a “problem” or method. The process used in this study was of an iterative nature, unfolding from the beginning throughout the years of the project. Some of the most relevant material was identified in unexpected or serendipitous ways, or by the research participants suggesting direction. The literature review is woven into the writing throughout the dissertation and a section on literature pertaining to resilience is also presented.

### 1.2.2 Adequacy of current resilience concepts in First Nations contexts

The lack of critical analysis of historical, colonial, and contemporary social contexts within which Aboriginal peoples live perpetuates a view of problems as located primarily within individuals. Using the word “resilience” in the context of studies pertaining to Aboriginal peoples can be problematic:

We need not rely on Eurocentric ways of knowing to know ourselves. Thus, from our Aboriginal perspective, resilience is irrelevant. In essence, we must ‘turn the gaze back’ to the system in order to enlighten ourselves about its insidious influence upon our collective identity. (Lavallee & Clearsky 2006, p. 5)

In general, mainstream academic research on resilience does not examine the perception of the research subjects (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). No studies have been found on the contemporary

view of the relationship of clan identity specifically from perspectives of participants working on their own resilience. Studies related to resilience of Aboriginal individuals and communities often objectify the people who are the “subjects” of the studies and risk omission of things that are at the heart of how Aboriginal peoples perceive their strength and resilience (Newhouse, 2006). The potential failure of correctly attributing risk and protective factors operating in resilience processes for Aboriginal peoples is not insignificant in its implications (Stout & Kipling, 2003). A deeper understanding of one First Nation family’s knowledge of itself contributes to existing literature and adds a significant viewpoint to the subject.

### 1.3 Definition of terms

Identifying terms and concepts to use in studying the topic from an “inside” perspective was an important part of the work. The first requirement was to find an appropriate term to use since no Anishnaabemowin word translates as *resilience*. *Mishkauzee* was identified by the family to be their word for *strength*. It is more correctly translated to “he/she is strong” (or, “a strong person”), and the word *mishkauziwin* more accurately means “strength.” Dr. Mary Ann Corbiere (language professor in the Native Studies Department, University of Sudbury) sees the difference as being one mainly of phraseology: Anishnaabemowin tends to use verbs much more frequently than nouns to express thoughts, with the basic variation being that *mishkauzee* is a verb and *mishkauziwin* is a noun. “Both express the same concept, strength; they’re just different parts of speech. Which form is used by speakers—the noun *mishkauziwin* or the verb *mishkauzee*—just depends on which sounds more natural to them. And which sounds more natural can depend on the purpose or context in which they’re saying it.” (M. Corbiere,

personal communication, October 3, 2013). Due to the dissertation being written in English (which uses nouns for abstract concepts) my use of the noun *mishkauziwin* ensures coherence in discourse structure.

The terms *family* and *family/clan* distinguish meaning in subtle ways. Not all family members claim their clan affiliation, or are members of the clan through the patrilineal descent customary in Anishnaabe society. Some people who affiliate with the clan have been “adopted” by a family member or did not have a male parent who was a member of that clan, and thus follow a male progenitor of their maternal line. *Family/clan* implies an additional layer of focus on specific intra-clan relationships and the teachings of the specific clan, or *Dodem*, of this extended family. In general, it can be said that the participants see themselves as both a family and a family/clan related through traditional clan ties.<sup>2</sup>

The terms *First Nation*, *Aboriginal*, *Native*, *original peoples*, *First Peoples* and *indigenous* are used in the paper interchangeably. There are disagreements about the understandings and usages of the terms “I(i)ndigenous,” “A(a)boriginal,” “N(n)ative,” “F(f)irst N(n)ation,” “Indian,” “F(f)irst P(p)eoples,” and “Native American,” and so forth, but it is not the purpose of this paper to engage in those debates. The terms are used in reference to the descendants of the original peoples of this continent. *Anishnaabe* is used in specific reference to the extended family participating in this study, and to the First Nation peoples who identify as Anishnaabe, and share a common cultural background. The term *indigenous* is used when referring to

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<sup>2</sup>This study does not reference, address, or make comparisons on the topic of clans in other ethnic groups since clan in general is not the sole focus of the study. *Dodem* is the *Anishnaabemowin* word indicating the clan “spirit,” and the clan animal.

original peoples in a global sense.<sup>3</sup> The outdated term “Indian” is not used unless by one of the research participants. When “Indian” is used by Native people amongst each other in everyday discourse, and in matters such as governance issues (e.g., discussing the Indian Act), it is not considered to be incorrect or disrespectful. Some political organizations, such as the Union of Ontario Indians, have retained its usage in official names.

Other Anishnaabemowin words in the paper are used by family members in their own dialect, and may not necessarily appear in any official dictionary, be spelled a particular way, or be used by those who speak different dialects. Every effort has been made to understand the meaning of the word by consulting language speakers and dictionaries. Any mistakes are those of the researcher.

#### 1.4 Methods

The research model—interdisciplinary/qualitative/indigenist—embodies the relational nature of this research. The term *indigenist research* refers to research grounded in indigenous values, principles, and guidelines (Chilisa, 2012; Rigney, 1999; Sinclair, 2003; Smith, 1999). This stance is appropriate as it supported the indigenous value of self-determination, and placed the researcher in the position of a research ally, not that of a distant academic observing and objectifying for purposes of personal gain. The indigenist characteristic does not refer to the person, event or process, but to an *aspect* or *quality* of the person or event, or to a certain *type* of process. The indigenist stance is similar to that which is taken in ethnographic studies,

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<sup>3</sup>The researcher also acknowledges the claim that all peoples have indigenous roots somewhere in various geographical and social contexts.

feminist and social justice research, Grounded Theory approaches, and others. It is not necessary to formulate an indigenist stance in terms of distinct sets of research methods, but it is necessary to accept that there exists a rational position from an indigenist point of view.

Olive Dickason's foundational work on the writing of Aboriginal history in Canada has clearly established the validity of an indigenist approach for this type of study (Dickason, 1992).

Interdisciplinary and qualitative research is particularly useful in studies of complex systems such as families, where there must exist a capacity to encompass multiple relationships embedded within and among multiple parts of the system and its environs. It requires an ability to move from a microanalysis of one component to a view of the larger patterns of the holistic system. It is not a linear sequential process but one that relies on pattern identification and relational causality (Morin, 2008). The interdisciplinarity of this study provided a vehicle for identifying patterns and relationships; its qualitative nature allowed for incorporation of multiple viewpoints with rich perspectives. The Modified Grounded Theory approach, with the family directing the process, allowed for reflection throughout on the emergence of meanings and kept the focus on the participants through the use of their words to examine the central phenomena (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 2001). This process allowed a focus on behavior and processes rather than content and people, maintaining the spiritual and cultural integrity of the family process.

#### 1.4.1 Overview of design

This research conforms to standards established by the *Guidelines for Health Research Involving Aboriginal People* (2007) in effect from May 2007 to December 2010, and that of

the replacement, the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS-2)*, Chapter 9, “Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples of Canada.” Chapter 9 establishes acceptable and sanctioned approaches to respectful research with Aboriginal peoples. It clarifies the context of the existing treaty rights, Aboriginal knowledges, and the roles of communities and participants in deciding upon which research they will engage with researchers. It was imperative to adhere to an understanding of these guidelines in this research project, with respect for the welfare of the people, the justice issues, and the need to engage respectfully with the broader Aboriginal community.<sup>4</sup>

After my introduction to some of the family members in 2006 I asked for an opportunity to present a proposal to engage in a research project together at their 2008 family reunion. Based on that presentation, they agreed to participate and together we formulated the list of topics to explore (see Appendix D), thereby ensuring that the project, while initiated by the researcher, thereafter was family-driven. We agreed that the primary researcher would create a Family Report to present at the 2012 Family reunion. This report would not become part of the final dissertation document since it would include names of family members and specific genealogical information. The family was assured of close adherence to standards of confidentiality and anonymity in the writing of the thesis. Publication of results beyond that of meeting academic requirements must be approved by the family, as they are the knowledge

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<sup>4</sup>The *Guideline for Ethical Aboriginal Research* (Research Review Working Committee, 2003) and the *First Nations Centre Templates for Ethical Research Practices* (First Nations Centre, 2007) were also referenced. The Interagency Advisory Panel on Responsible Conduct of Research establishes the framework by which universities and institutions funded by the government of Canada agree to adhere to the Tri-Council Policy. Laurentian University is a signatory to the PRCR and is thus governed by the guidelines in conduct and review of research.<http://www.rcr.ethics.gc.ca/policy-politique/framework-cadre>

holders. This is in keeping with the customary, contemporary understanding of responsible research with Aboriginal peoples.

The *relational* nature of a family centered indigenist approach facilitates the handling of power asymmetry between researcher and participants, and demystifies processes of research. Both the family participants and the academy benefit from an approach with a heuristic character and a flavor of participatory research (Kahakalau, 2004), which is located in a framework of postcolonial theoretical perspectives (Browne, Smye, & Varcoe, 2005; Lavallee & Clearsky, 2006; Rigney, 1999).

Following the 2008 pilot project, the family extended a formal Letter of Invitation (Appendix A), which met the requirements of the Laurentian University Research Ethics Board review. Subsequently, the Letter of Information to the Family Participants introducing the family to the formal research project and the Consent/Information Form which participants needed to sign (Appendices B and C) were distributed to family participants. Family members had adequate opportunity to participate in dialogue on the collection of information and analysis processes throughout the course of the study. “Data” or “information gathered” was obtained through open-ended interviews, participation in family events, and reviewing family documents and photographs, methods that are seen as appropriate to a research project of this type. As well, another method, family Talking Circles, which is seen as particularly germane to research concerning Aboriginal social issues, was used. This is distinguished from the method of focus groups often used in qualitative research approaches.

The Family Report and its presentation became part of the “giving back” process. Too often, research fails to consider ongoing needs of participants, and the results are seen to have little connection with participants’ realities. Responsible research in Aboriginal contexts, regardless of who is conducting the research, will contain a giving back component. This aspect of the research structure is an important part of indigenist research models and processes (Kovach, 2009). The idea of “giving back” as a component of indigenist research contains the obligation on the part of the researcher: “to change the world, to engage in ethical work that makes a positive difference” (Denzin, 2010, p.115).

### 1.5 Limitations and delimitations

In this descriptive study, *terministic screens* (cultural blinders or cognitive filters) of researcher and participants can be expected to influence perception, identity, and agency (Valsiner, 2006, p. 168), which augment or minimize aspects of what is examined and learned. This study specifically focused on interests that are family-driven and narrowed further for the purposes of the dissertation process to examine only certain things as closely as possible in a brief time span.

The perceptions of the research participants segue into the area of knowledge construction—epistemology—and the nature of knowledge in general, an area of significant challenge. The current discourse on indigenous knowledges is a contested area (Peat, 1996), not just in the Native Studies field, but everywhere. This study examined a singular aspect of indigenous knowledge arising from the personal realm as contrasted to the “scientific” realm, allowing inquiry into an area not often visible in the academy. Looking closely at one family’s



experiences and perceptions is valuable in and of itself, highlighting viewpoints of people who are often invisible to professionals, academics, government officials, and business leaders who operate in structural roles with far-reaching impact in the lives of the participants.

The generalizability of this study is rooted in the fundamental right of people having agency to be seen and heard *in the way they choose to be seen and heard*. The gift this family offers by sharing their perceptions with a broader audience is invaluable, and can inspire other families and communities to examine their own strength in new ways, using their own designs, and communicating their own findings to larger audiences in an infinite variety of ways. Certain viewpoints and experiences may be invisible to other family members, as well, and this study may help family members add to their views and experiences of resilience. The knowledge generated by this type of work contributes to new narratives, encouraging capacity-building approaches in self-governance efforts and alternatives in relationships with the larger society. Knowledge coming from the heart of families provides foundational blocks that guide structural relationships with others, benefitting both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.

## 1.6 Summary

This study used a family-directed, interdisciplinary/qualitative/indigenist approach to examine an extended Anishnaabe family's perception of their *mishkauziwin*. The chosen model of research braided together interdisciplinarity and qualitative approaches with an indigenist research approach. In this research, questions explored were motivated by a desire to know more about the understandings of *mishkauziwin* as strength and resilience emerging from a family striving to revitalize its identity. The mutual search to understand participants'

perceptions of their *mishkauziwin* can catalyse a broader perspective on the resilience of First Nations peoples.

## Chapter 2

### 2 Beginning the journey

The journey of resilience that concerns me, and is presented here as I locate the research, the participants, and myself traverses treaty land. It is territory on which many different peoples have been traveling for millennia—colonizer, settler and immigrant for only the past few centuries. This story is almost invisible to the dominant mainstream population, which often disregards the realities of the First Peoples of this continent, so it is necessary to adequately locate myself in the context of this project because it is unique, and has significant potential to bring light to an aspect of reality that may not easily be seen in other ways.

The story of resilience of the First Peoples may not be seen as appropriate for me to address since I am not indigenous to this land, and could be misunderstood by both the academic community and the indigenous community. This type of multicultural work is difficult and often resisted (Mio & Awakuni, 2000), but it is valuable work, and is an effort toward ending complicity in the ongoing processes of colonization and assimilation in a society that has “failed to keep faith with the treaties. . .or to confer any meaningful powers of self-government” (Bartlett, 1988, p. 43) This unique study of resilience from the perspective of a First Nation family working on their revitalization, researching *with* a non-native researcher, has important lessons to share. The work of the family is similar to what is happening in indigenous settings elsewhere, and the knowledge gained in this particular study may represent

only a small aspect of the larger reality, but it brings shared value to our understandings of resilience in general.

## 2.1 Locating the researcher

As the primary researcher exploring these questions, my responsibility is to situate myself in the research context and process as a participant located in relationship circles, and thus make claims about myself, my investment, and my intention (Absolon & Willet, 2005, p. 112). The story I am examining intersects paths where travelers of different ways come together, and where the identity, strength, and survival of the First Peoples are seen clearly. This story is grounded in a unique location—the position and the relationships where the family in the study and I explore ways of looking at a new concept of resilience through perceptions held by family members. It is a story about a special research journey engaging us as partners, and revealing another layer of understanding of the mystery of human resilience.

All new stories begin with a dream, but the story of resilience, while it may begin with a dream, is not a fairy tale. Fairy tales begin with “Once upon a time,” follow with the story of a nightmare, and conclude with a resolution that usually ends on a note of “happily ever after.” This new story of resilience has many different endings, happiness being the least of these, although happiness may arrive in the next story told, or the next dream dreamed. The story of resilience is elusive, not often told in a world dominated by the mantra of “produce and consume, strive and succeed.” When the story of resilience is told, it is usually framed in the context of outcomes that fit the framework of the dominant world, with little space for margins.

There is another story of resilience. It is like a boat, or canoe, softly and silently moving through fog covered waters, almost out of view of those on shore who seek to see it clearly and wait eagerly to know what it carries. We faintly perceive the voices of passengers emerging from this conveyance, their journey barely noticed because others' inability to hear imposes a silence on the travelers. A thick fog covers the land—those who journey without stories of strength and survival are lost, and there is little wisdom to guide safe passage. It is my hope that this research will help us go through the fog so that we may have a better view of what has happened in the past, and is happening now.

In this story, I imagine a specific First Nations family on one corner (for there can be no monolithic representation of all First Nations peoples); on another corner stand representatives of settlers (no more monolithic than First Nations peoples); and this individual scholar on a third corner looks on. The “scholar” has been represented in the past in many different ways with the exploitive view being more than familiar. Engaging in a research partnership with mutuality, reciprocity, and “relational accountability” (Chilisa, 2012, p. 122) while striving to work across boundaries respectfully, helps mitigate power differentials inherent in “insider/outsider” research with the goal of avoiding exploitive methods and outcomes (Chilisa, 2012, p. 47; Smith, 1999, pp.137–140; Wilson, S., 2008, p. 129). On the fourth corner, devoid of observers or participants, storytellers or listeners, a fire is waiting in an open space, a spiritual fire in an uncontested sacred place where strangers and acquaintances can gather to share stories of past journeys, and prepare for future journeys.

The question compelling my attention, from my scholar's corner, is this: where is the story that represents First Nations peoples' perception of resilience, and how can I truly hear and convey that story in a respectful way that widens and expands understandings of resilience? Some of the many questions underlying my interest in this topic are as follows: is there a story of resilience that can contain, and transcend, the pain and strength of a family which has survived past and ongoing processes of colonization, occupation, genocide, and institutionalized discrimination? Are there ways to explore and understand resilience of First Nations peoples that have the capacity to bridge vast cultural and ideological differences between the perspectives of First Nations peoples and the viewpoints of professionals in the mainstream academy and human services fields? Will gaining a deeper understanding of resilience from the perspectives of this particular family broaden our understanding of resilience in human societies in general? In order to tell the story of resilience in a new way I must first truly hear what the family is saying and what they mean, and then convey that in a respectful way which will widen and expand the view of resilience in Aboriginal contexts.

As a non-native researcher working within a context of an Anishnaabe family journey, some might ask: "Who are you to take on such a task, and why would this family choose to work with you?" The backdrop of information about who I am as a unique individual with a particular history and identity, and the life experiences that have shaped my adult journey, provide insight into this question. Throughout most of my adult life I have sought out knowledge of contemporary and historical Native life, not only through study and books, but also through intentionally and consciously building relationships in Indigenous communities

on the North American continent. My experiences grew through personal (not work or academic) encounters guided by intuition and the opportunities those relationships created. I experienced windows and doors into the life-world of my friends and acquaintances of the Navajo Nation of the southwest, the Poarch Creek Indian Reservation of Alabama, the off-reserve communities of Pokagon's descendants in the Potawatomi territories around northern Indiana, and the Diasporas of many nations near the tri-state area of southern Iowa. In each of these territories I grew to feel comfortable within a family and community setting, and the relationships have stretched through the years to challenge and nurture me. I had no privileged access into these relationships and recognize through them the potential I have to do the work required. It is a potential I believe exists for other families and researchers willing to invest the time and effort to work at respectful and appropriate relationships.

Another aspect of my personal location that is significant to this study is my background as a professional social worker. During my early career in the 1970s, I focused for several years on working with children in the inner city of Toledo, Ohio, which was both inspiring and daunting. I later moved to the field of mental health and addiction, working primarily with adults who suffered from serious mental illnesses and also with children and adults who had suffered deep traumas in their lives. My role as a mental health and addictions therapist offers me heart-satisfying work through which my core values are expressed. To listen with the heart, be present with the people who seek my assistance, affirm the principles of self-determination and choice, and always offer what I have to give in a non-judgmental manner, is central to that

in which my training and experience ground me. These principles were key aspects of my research approach in my personal conduct, and facilitated the working together.

I sometimes say to people, “There isn’t anything you could tell me which would surprise or shock me—there isn’t much I haven’t heard.” Through the course of this research project I *have* encountered things that surprised and shocked me, one of the primary things being the story of the Residential Schools, and the role they played in the genocide of the indigenous peoples on this continent. My personal approach to this ongoing process of learning is to consider the work I do as a sacred trust, so it was natural for me to bring this perspective to the developing “research ceremony” with the family participants. My role of social worker has made me a better researcher for this type of study, but it is also true that this research project has had a profound effect on me in ways that have expanded my capacity as a clinical social worker, especially when working with First Nations individuals, families and communities.

The training I received in family therapy while I worked as a clinical social worker fine-tuned my ability to look for patterns in the way by which family members’ interactions either supported positive change or sabotaged healthy growth and development. Over the years in my career I have seen the pattern of people facing and overcoming great difficulties—the effects of growing up in an alcoholic home, the results of repeated domestic abuse, the tragedies of death and mental illness—and emerging with abilities to thrive, to stay connected, to love and grow. This persistent theme inspired me to attempt a deeper look at the phenomena of human resilience by pursuing doctoral studies at a stage in my career where planning for retirement might be timely. The results of a unique research with this extended family have given me



much to think about, and have also led me to some conclusions that are specific to this study, and addressed further in the final chapter.

The metaphor of a spiritual fire helps me locate, or place in perspective, various aspects of my effort to develop a First Nation model of resilience. The metaphor illustrates the partnership created in the ceremony of research (Wilson, S., 2008). As I step forward into the circle around the fire, my primary responsibility is to affirm relationships of trust, respect, and responsibility. I am not a disinterested, detached, completely objective listener, but a co-participant in a family journey, locating the story I bring to the sacred fire and situating myself in the relationship circles of my personal journey. My primary role is to bring forward what I have to offer and to serve as catalyst and supporter, guided by the family and moving forward toward a mutual goal of discovery.

There is a scholar out on the prairies, a descendant of North American settlers, who has collected his stories and gathered them into the book, *We Are All Treaty People: Prairie Essays* (Epp, 2008), where he writes:

Agrarian thought, though it was forged against the princes and landlords of Europe, found its North American antithesis in the Aboriginal; farmer-settlers were foot-soldiers in the civilizing mission of cultivation. At least that has been the story we've told ourselves. My claim in this essay is that on these prairies, we are all treaty people—settler and Aboriginal. I am not interested in easy self-flagellation. Rather, it is important to recall a more complex historic relationship than mere conquest and to

recast the difficulties of accommodation, memory and reconciliation as the “settler problem,” rather than, as the policy makers once put it, the “Indian problem.” (p. 5)

The realities of Northern Ontario contain the same complex stories of foot soldiers and missionaries, settlers and Aboriginal peoples, all treaty people living on this Cambrian Shield, in this forested territory richly watered by lakes and streams, inhabited by many Nations and non-human living beings. From a scholar’s corner here in northwestern Ontario I also ask: where are the First Peoples’ perceptions and experiences? Is there space in this journey for a scholar whose perceptions have been shaped by a cultural heritage not indigenous to this land? Telling my personal story is an essential aspect of the backdrop of the study. This location process helps to create increased levels of trust and understanding in intercultural research relationships, thus maintaining cultural safety.

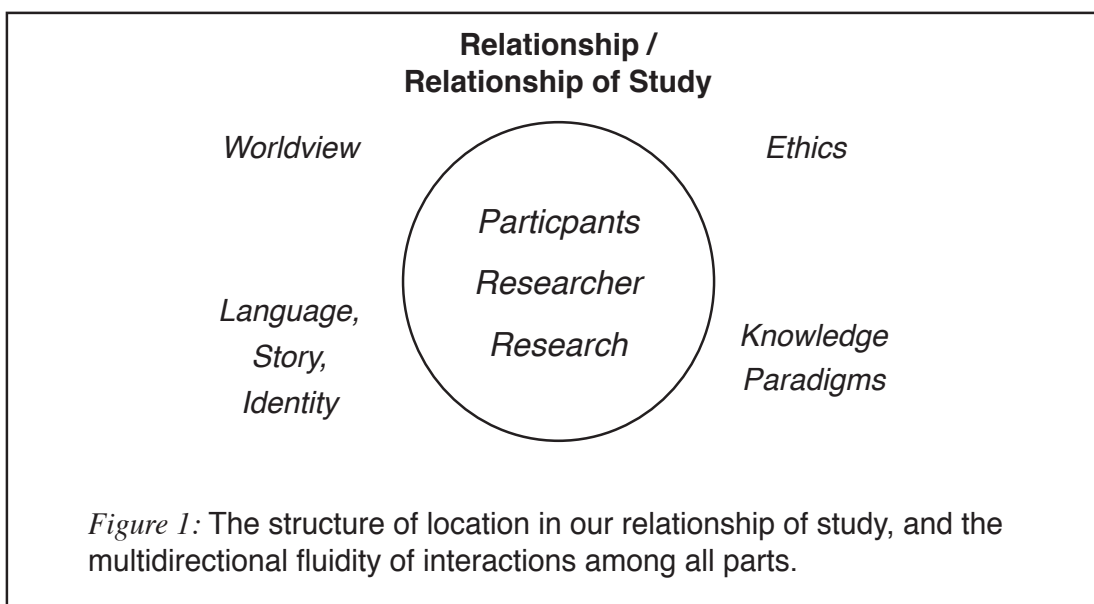
As a descendant of settlers on the North American continent, I identify myself in a variety of ways. Sometimes I see myself at the margins of the dominant world, and sometimes I recognize myself as part of the mainstream of that world. By “accident of birth” I am racially designated Caucasian, or “white,” but I do not believe in accidents, nor do I believe that racializing relationships is helpful in increasing understanding and constructing viable interpersonal and intercultural bridges. The racialization of discourse contributes to divisive stances, hampering potential healing and bridge building. Personal experiences in the “Jim Crow” environment of my early childhood in the southern United States showed me long ago that people cannot be ranked and categorized racially without dehumanizing them.

I have memories as a young child of the severe bigotry in the attitudes from other people that my family occasionally encountered. We were white “Yankees” living in the “deep south” and my parents chose to disregard the racial segregationist laws and standards of the regional social structure. The results of some of their choices, driven by their religious beliefs, occasionally placed our family in dangerous situations, but the outcomes grounded in me a clear sense of justice and fairness, humility and respect for people who were different than me. My early childhood experiences left a life-long impression on me of the importance of caring for people, the realities of danger, and the necessity to work for peace and understanding. This aspect of my identity is a driving force in my interest in the topic of resilience.

In exploring the concept of location, and working to adequately locate myself within this research project, I began to look at the questions I have about strength and resilience. What is that elusive thing that keeps people going and helps them overcome trauma and difficulty? What do we know and what is missing? One of the things I know from my own journey is this: something inside human beings naturally calls them to move toward healing and growth, toward agency and capacity, and toward adaptability and mastery. We have within us what we need for the journey, but we also need something outside of ourselves with which to connect to help us on the way. What is it that helps humans to be resilient? My role in the family as both *outsider* by birth and mantle of researcher, and *insider* by established years of trust and relationship, is a significant component of the research process.

## 2.2 Locating the participants.

The participants in the research project understood themselves to be entering into relationship of study with me. Issues of consultation, self-determination, privacy, confidentiality, anonymity and ownership of knowledge are core concerns, especially in research with Aboriginal peoples (CIHR *Tri-Council Policy Statement*). In writing about the project I make references to treaties, clans, and geographical location only as necessary. The location of the family is described here with all of this in mind, and I make every effort to keep faith with the participants in respect of *their* knowledge. It is not my place to judge, evaluate, rank, order, compare, or categorize what they are learning. It is my place to engage in a mutual effort to gain understanding, and to write about what we have learned in the most respectful of ways. The effort to locate the research in the context of the family experiences, worldviews, language, history, sense of identity and knowledge paradigms benefits everyone concerned. The topic of location as an integral aspect of writing about the research is important because it lends a contextual understanding to the outcomes of the work. This is not a comprehensive discourse on all aspects pertaining to the topic, which would take volumes to adequately address, but it is reflective of both the process engaged in by the family and researcher, and the knowledge that was gained. It is a holistic process, where each part affects, and is affected by, the other.



As a settler descendant I have a different story than Aboriginal peoples as we engage in the process of recalling and remembering our complementary roles as treaty people. Most settler descendants largely avoid the effort involved in that process (Regan, 2010) and take as an entitlement the privileges gained at the expense of Aboriginal peoples. The settler descendants and new immigrants have mostly used their time on treaty land in striving and working hard, and often with well-meaning yet misguided efforts, imposing their own ways of life on the First Peoples whose territory they occupied or shared. The land once known as Turtle Island has become pressed down, covered with farms, roads, houses, hospitals, schools, factories, mines, pipelines—all the trappings of a modern society—and the indigenous life that was once here is increasingly stripped away along with the environment within which it was nested. The fire at the heart of indigenous life is flickering, yet its memory inspires, and can ignite the flame again in new ways.

The particular story of resilience that I wish to know, the one that carries the strength of the fire, is one that this land and its original peoples can teach. Different places and seasons have different stories, and as the seasons turn, all stories are told, both old and new. When the stories have been fully heard, and we are able to live out the lessons they hold, Turtle Island may rebound in some distant future in an isotropic fashion to its former wholeness and balance. Stories of strength and resilience birth hope, and teachers from all directions share the responsibility for healing that which has been so profoundly wounded.

The First Nations family standing in their location is the place I chose to begin my journey, in response to their invitation to enter a relationship of study with them—a ceremony of research. Without the invitation there would be no shared journey of learning together. The unique story of this specific family is a story marginalized by the dominant world, unknown or misunderstood, yet it represents the particular story of resilience for which I listen as I stand on the margins. Crossing divisions is always a risky venture, yet it is the only path into a space where new understandings begin.

New understandings gained through this research project can help create opportunities for peoples from multiple paths to share their stories of resilience, and of healing. There is a current potential for settler descendants to recall, remember, and perhaps learn for the first time, how to live in “right relationship” within the markers of treaty agreements holding mutual responsibilities that must be respected. The future will be affected by people from every walk of life who are willing to pick up this responsibility—teachers, social workers, health care workers, political leaders, business leaders, scientists, immigrants, etc. Settler descendants

cannot complacently wait to have things explained to them by the very people who have been ignored and silenced, but need to actively engage in learning *with* indigenous peoples, and accept the roles of treaty people capable of recognizing the truth about their status. It is time to truly hear and understand the stories belonging to Aboriginal peoples and learn about their *mishkauziwin*.

The participants of the research are situated in the context of Anishnaabe clan history, in a specific family network whose territory lies north of the Great Lakes. Darlene Johnston, a specialist in Great Lakes Aboriginal history, clarifies the significance of Anishnaabe clan membership as an integral aspect of identity in her Exhibit submitted for the Ipperwash Commission of Inquiry (Johnston, 2007). Her research outlines how important totemic identity was in the connection of Anishnaabe peoples to their territories:

Connecting people to place requires an exploration of how people understand themselves in relation to their place. For the Aboriginal peoples of the Great Lakes, there is both a physical and spiritual aspect to identity and landscape. The relationship between people and place [is] created and maintained by totemic identity. (p. 3)

Her careful examination of totemic identity is founded on examination of the early French and English records as well as on pictorial records, the oral history, and contemporary evidence of continuity of totemic, or clan, identity. She refers to the clans, or totems, as “the glue that held the [*Anishnaabeg*] Great Lakes world together.” (p.7) Connection to the land and to the ancestors, “both human and other than human” is at the heart of the Anishnaabe clan system

(p.24). The Anishnaabe family working on revitalizing a family/clan identity can be seen as enacting what is a timeless aspect of identity formation, rooted within their own lives in their own territory, the land of their ancestors.

An additional perspective of the link between the physical and the totemic representation of the clan is seen in the work of Cory Willmott (2013) who examines identity through metaphor. He writes:

The ontological metaphor of the totemic system represented an essential continuity between humans and animals in which each retained their autonomy. . . . Relations of reciprocal exchange were enacted among persons, human and otherwise, in a subsistence economy in which the household was the basic economic unit, but the *doodem* provided a broader support network in times of need. (p.35)

This intricate and complex network of kinship has existed in Anishnaabe cultural identity for thousands of years and the relatively recent disruption has not completely obliterated the network. Bohaker (2006) also describes the powerful connecting force of clan identity:

In this cultural tradition, people inherited their *nindoodemag* identities from their fathers: they conceived of themselves as related to and having kin obligations toward those who shared the same other-than-human progenitor being. Evidence from a wide range of sources, including oral traditions, iconography, linguistics, and material culture, all speak to the importance of these networks in Anishinaabe social and political life. (pp. 25-26)



The family that initiated this research is operating out of an impulse to restore what is a deep and abiding aspect of their identity, illuminating a cultural memory of powerful connections within the family and a not-too-far removed historical reality.

The complex and multilayered aspects of clan identity for Anishnaabe peoples cut across “shifting boundaries” of identity, and the stretch between community and individual interests. Difficult problems must be confronted when modeling self-government on clan systems (Aasen, 1992; Dumont, 1993); yet each community must decide how it will move forward (Nabigon, 2003). Communities, made of families and individuals, are in an increasingly global world linked by the internet where community is not a concept defined solely by physical location, but is identified by complex, multilayered relationships, and segmented by conflicting interests.

Interest in restoration of clan systems is strong among people with a desire to align their identities, values and lifestyles with their Anishnaabe identification. The degree to which there are contemporary differences between traditional and non-traditional Anishnaabe peoples in clan identification, understanding, and practice has not been addressed in academic fashion. The relationship between clan identification and perceptions of strength and resilience has not been studied despite the recognition that many Elder<sup>55</sup>s have knowledge to pass on regarding these matters. Many Native academics, communities, and organizations have engaged in efforts to preserve and pass forward that knowledge, and there is evidence of deep respect

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<sup>55</sup> I have capitalized “Elder” to refer to a spiritual leader; when not capitalized, “elder” refers to an older person.

accorded the knowledge holders among Elders and older people in Native communities (Benton-Banai, 1988; Rice, 2005; Sitting Eagle, 1993; Toulouse, 2006). Clan identity continues to have contemporary importance for Anishnaabe individuals, families, and communities.

The revitalization of clan identity for Aboriginal peoples whose traditions include clan structures is only one aspect of contemporary issues related to self-governance (Dumont, 1993). Helin (2006) does not specifically address clan structures in his model of “Indigenous success,” but details his own clan origin extensively. He devotes significant time in his writing to what he calls “the fourth wave” or “a way out of the storm” (pp.165–252), and uses the metaphor of a canoe journey in his effort to delineate the journey Aboriginal peoples have taken to find their way beyond the first three “waves.” The *first wave* was the era of pre-contact life, the *second wave* was the “colonial storm,” and the *third wave* was that of disrupted communities. It is in this third wave era that official governmental policy “intended to displace traditional forms of governance” (p. 256) such as clan structures. This has contributed to an almost total disempowerment of the people, distancing contemporary communities from the “independence and self-reliance” (p. 259) of pre-contact life. The clan system of the Anishnaabe began to submerge in the second wave, almost completely disappeared in the third wave, and now there is an attempt by some to place it back into the canoe during the current *fourth wave* era.

### 2.2.1 Anishnaabe clan history

The persistent efforts of many Elders, on reserve and off reserve, to pass on original knowledge have facilitated a continuation of traditional knowledge, but much regarding clan knowledge is “not complete” (Sitting Eagle, 1993). Some Anishnaabe knowledge holders have made the remnants of clan teachings available in written form (Benton-Banai, 1988; Dumont, 1993; Musqua, as quoted in Knight, 2001; Mosher, 1999; Sitting Eagle, 1993; Skead, 1999; Toulouse, 2006; Warren, 1885/1984), but much traditional knowledge remains in oral tradition. Elders pass on these traditions to people who seek the knowledge in appropriate ways using correct cultural and spiritual protocols. For some, the traditional teachings must remain in the oral tradition if it is considered to be sacred knowledge where written form would risk a violation of spiritual power. Elders who carry this sacred knowledge have differing opinions on what can be written and what cannot be written. The general topic of traditional Aboriginal knowledge overall remains a contested area for many people, including those in the academic world, and there is no single, standardized, universally accepted body of “Anishnaabe traditional clan knowledge” that could be comparable to ecclesiastical canon or academic disciplines.

Understandings of Anishnaabe clans, clan structures, clan teachings and ceremonies are varied. The small amount of literature available on Anishnaabe clans shows a range of knowledges and representations of the clans. Clan systems in general, organized around either paternal or maternal lineages can function in similar ways. For example, the Carrier–Sekani peoples of British Columbia have a matrilineal system organized in a similar fashion to the patrilineal

Anishnaabe clan system where different clans crosscut local band units and unite individuals and families from independent bands (Aasen, 1992). The Carrier–Sekani people, two distinct but united groups, are currently endeavoring to meet the difficult challenges of revitalizing their traditional clan system as a model for self-government (p. 185). This has not yet been the case in most Anishnaabe First Nation bands, although a beginning of this process 25 years ago by the Roseau River Tribal Council, Manitoba, has been documented (Dumont, 1993, p. 74). In his report to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (the full set of the RCAP five-volume report was published in 1996), Dumont provides a detailed description of the process of clan structure and functioning, and its effectiveness in governance with his discussion of a contemporary translation of a “clan-based system of government and its implications for an aboriginally based justice system” (p. 75).

Aboriginal societies built on clan systems structure themselves around a network of cooperation working for the common welfare of the people (Fixico, 2003, p. 47). The reciprocity of kinship relations is mutual and bi-directional on all levels, as represented by the statement: “clans represented by animal and plant totems [practice] group protection, guardianship, and unity of the group” (p. 53). Fixico goes on to cite examples from the Creek, Seminole, Navajo, and Cherokee Nations of clan importance to social structure and the essential inter-connectedness of the people (p. 66). Mosher (1999) describes the clan system of the Anishnaabe as patrilineal whereas the Cree and Mohawk follow a matrilineal structure. Mosher emphasizes the importance of clan as *family* (pp. 155–156).

The traditional Anishnaabe clan system guided all aspects of individual and family life within a cosmology seen as arising from the beginning of time (Benton-Banai, 1988; Boatman, 1992; Dumont, 1993; Hallowell, 1955/1967; Knight, 2001; Mishibinijima, 2005). The Anishnaabe peoples of the Great Lakes areas share the teachings of a distinct culture organized around the guiding principles of seven original clans as identified by Anishnaabe cosmology (Boatman, 1992). Contemporary Anishnaabe authors usually describe the traditional clan structure in the following way: the Crane Clan and Loon Clan had leadership responsibilities; the Fish Clan served as philosophers and mediators; the Bear Clan served as guardians and healers; the Marten Clan served as the warriors or the protectors; the Deer Clan were reconcilers, or pacifists; and Bird Clan members were pursuers of spiritual and intellectual knowledge (Benton-Banai, 1988; Dumont, 1993; Mishibinijima, 2005; Sitting Eagle, 1993).<sup>6</sup> The clans had specific responsibilities within the community including detailed obligations between clans.

Hallowell (1955/1967) produced a substantial body of work based on his study of the Anishnaabe of the Lake Winnipeg area in the 1920s and 1930s, but failed to grasp the full significance of the Anishnaabe clan system in his pursuit of finding the “the roots of culture . . . at the prehuman [*sic*] level” (p. 2). His work may well represent the state of the art of social

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<sup>6</sup>Sitting Eagle acknowledges the Elders of Roseau River Anishinabe First Nation and his teacher, a fourth degree *Mide* Priest, Eddie Benton-Banai, as the source of his knowledge of the clan system (Sitting Eagle, 1993). The *Midewiwin* (Grand Medicine Society) have varying degrees of initiation, which are not practiced in a universal fashion among all Anishnaabe. The *Midewiwin* members carry forward much knowledge about the clans, but their knowledge is sacred and not spoken of outside of ceremonial functions, nor is it permitted to be written.

and psychological anthropology for his time, but it is also an example of many of the problems stemming from the type of research non-Native peoples conducted in Native settings in the past. Hallowell evidenced genuine respect for the people of the Lake Winnipeg area, and his work is considered the best of its era, so perhaps to criticize with today's "eyes" does his work a disservice.

Societies based upon oral tradition rely on Elders and storytellers to convey knowledge from generation to generation in addition to using their knowledge to serve the society. Each clan and family has a sacred trust to pass on previous generations' accumulated wisdom to the following generations. Much knowledge is lost when oral societies are disrupted by massive death, displacement and destruction of self-governance systems. The resulting social and psychological disorganization has a chaotic ripple effect throughout the fabric of the society through time. Despite such a pattern in Anishnaabe society, clan system teachings remain a part of traditional knowledge, and contemporary interest in clans is strengthening. Clans are the very foundation of Anishnaabe society, illustrated by the following quotes:

The Elders told stories about a time in the very distant past when these special manitos, while still on the Earth in physical body forms, united biologically with humans to form the various totemic clans of traditional human societies. (Boatman, 1992, p. 17)

It is believed that when clan families were in trouble they could call on the natural forces to assist them in their problems . . . The connection to the animals was strong because the language of the people was strong. It is said that because we speak mostly English and have

adopted foreign ways that we have weakened that link to the animal world. (Toulouse, 2006, p. 54)

One of the natural laws that the Creator gave the people along with the Clan System was that there was to be no intermarriage of people in the same clan. In this way the blood of the Earth's second people would be kept pure and strong. (Benton-Banai, 1988, p. 77)

There was said to be no wars and very little violence in these days when the Clan System was strong. In the Clan system was built equal justice, voice, law and order. It reinforced by its very nature the teachings and principles of a sacred way of life. It is interesting to think of where our society might be today if the people had held the Clan System together in its original form and power.(p. 78)

The Great law [*sic*] of Clans had been given to the People as a way of sacred knowledge and order—a system that became a framework of government, for the unity, strength and social order of the Nation. This clan system became the way in which people could and did maintain individual and collective identity without separation from the village, tribe, or the Nation.” (Sitting Eagle, 1993, pages not numbered)

Although the Anishnaabe clan system is patrilineal, where the children take on the father's clan, the equality of men, women and children was considered integral in the clan system which was democratic, and clan leaders traditionally could be either male or female (Sitting Eagle, 1993). There were specific women's roles in certain clans and some of the teachings regarding those roles remain intact today, even though during the years of 1930–1970

government oppression resulted in the suppression and disappearance of almost all knowledge around women's roles in teaching clan responsibilities (Knight, 2001, p. 73; Mosher, 1999).

The link between the animal *Dodem*<sup>7</sup> and the clan is of critical importance (Skead, 1999, pp. 186–187). Skead names four original clans as the White Eagle, White Wolf, White Buffalo, and White Bear (p. 186). Fred Kelly (2008) also describes these four clans as original and outlines their principal roles in relationships to the people. He describes these animal spirits as “adopting” the Anishnaabe, and names the White Eagle as the White Winged Spirit of the south (pp. 37-38). He writes, “In time, all other spiritual beings followed until all Anishinaabe families were adopted forming the original clan system” (p. 38). The significance of the *Dodem* is seen in signatures on original treaty documents where the signatories placed a symbol of their animal *Dodem* beside their mark or name (Sims, 1996, pp. 37, 46–47).

Rice (2005) speaks of an archetypal facet of the relationship with both the natural world and ancestral spirits, which “can be developed by fasting and dreams. These express themselves in the conscious mind in symbolic form” (p. 65). He applies a psychoanalytic structure to this facet and describes it as “a result of the collective unconscious transmitting knowledge to the conscious mind through the personal unconscious” (p. 65), but the individualistic flavor of psychoanalytic interpretation cannot fully account for the communal contexts of clan roles and functions which are simultaneously spiritual and physical. Rice links his understanding of the Aboriginal search for connection with “the universal conscious” to his belief that some non-

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<sup>7</sup>*Dodem*, or *Dodaim*, is commonly translated into English as *totem*, but conveys a far more extensive meaning of spiritual and physical relationship than the word *totem*. F. Kelly (2008) refers to the “[*ndotem*] system of relationship from which the word totem originates” (p. 37).



indigenous peoples are developing deeper understandings. They “are seeking answers through ancient teachings . . . .With patience, prayer and meditation, they are only now beginning to understand in part what it is like to ‘*See the World with Aboriginal Eyes*’ ”(p.85). As a result of assimilation, many indigenous peoples are also now embarking on that journey to understanding ancient ways of thinking and perceiving the world.

One of the earliest writers on clan history of the Anishnaabe is William W. Warren, (1885/1984). Of mixed European and Anishnaabe descent, he was a fluent native speaker of Anishnaabemowin, highly educated in the Western educational system of the era, and well able to use oral history methodology in his work, as he relied almost solely on the oral knowledge of the people he worked with. Warren used the term “Ojibway” for Anishnaabe people, and portrayed the people as being a unified gathering of different bands, covering a very large territory around the Great Lakes region and including Leech Lake, Red Lake, and Lake Winnipeg. He describes the clan system as a “regular system of governmental polity” (Warren, p. 316), a self-governance structure maintained in unbroken “natural simplicity” until the pressures of the fur trade and the War of 1812 and subsequent developments finalized the complete rupture of the system.

The Crane Clan had the greatest leadership position (p. 317), which continued throughout the period of disruption of the clan system (p. 319). Warren describes clearly the relationship of the “war chiefs” and clan leaders to the principal villages and various bands, and their influence. At the time of his book’s publication in 1885 he was describing the Anishnaabe peoples as “being degenerated by a close contact with an unprincipled frontier white

population” (p. 385). The 1826 Treaty of Fond du Lac, made in Wisconsin between the United States government and the Anishnaabe (Ojibways) of that area, is cited as “the commencement of innovations which have entirely broken up the civil polity of the Ojibways” (p. 394). He states that the “Totemic” system has far greater significance than is given it by other writers on matters “respecting the Indians.”

Warren named five original clans—crane, catfish, loon, bear, and marten, and other minor clans such as reindeer, wolf, merman, pike, lynx, eagle, goose, beaver, sucker, sturgeon, gull, hawk, cormorant, white-fish, rattlesnake, and moose, many of which “are not known to the tribe in general” (pp. 43–46). The clans were given to the Anishnaabe by beings that came to them from the deep on the shores of a great salt water “when the Earth was new” (pp. 43–44). He discussed the structure and population of the various clans around the southern region of the Great Lakes during his time, named and described the Elders from whom he gained his information, and detailed the oral history regarding clan stories he received. He described the Loon Clan as “an important body in the Ojibway tribe” (p. 48), with prominent leadership roles, but did not detail the roles and responsibilities of the clans. In his opinion, the clan system had “remarkable purity with which the system has been kept up for ages, [and] finds no other parallel in the history of mankind” (p. 53). He considered the clan system an important component of understanding the origin stories, and throughout his book he consistently designated the clan memberships of the people he wrote about, and discussed their relationships with other clans.

An affinity with the French is clear in Warren's writing as he described the damaging effects on the Anishnaabe peoples of the English and American systems. He stated that the French understood the clan system protocols. "They conformed also to their system of governmental polity, of which the totemic division formed the principal ingredient." (p. 135). In his documentation of the pivotal and crucial role clans held, Warren described how the British and the Americans, in contrast to the French, intentionally set about to destroy and disrupt the clan system and the roles of the hereditary chiefs. He viewed the undermining of the clan system to be the fundamental cause of the disintegration of Anishnaabe life (p. 135). Warren believed that through the destruction of the clan system "misunderstandings and non-conformity have arisen to treaties which have been made . . . which are of the same nature that eventually led to the Creek, Seminole and Black Hawk wars." (p. 136). He reported that in relationships with the Dakotas where intermarriage and adoption of the clan system occurred, members of a clan would be recognized as blood relatives even if they were of a different tribe (p. 165). This did not, however, prevent war from eventually breaking out between the Dakota and Anishnaabe as a consequence of fur trade and territorial pressures, and to the eventual deep divisions between the two peoples (pp. 163–189).

Regarding the origins of the Anishnaabe peoples, Warren wrote, "They fully believe, and it forms part of their religion, that the world has once been covered by a deluge, and that we are now living on what they term the 'new earth'. . . in their Me-da-we-win or Religion, hieroglyphics are used to denote this second earth" (p.55). The word *An-ish-in-aub-ag* literally translated signifies "spontaneous man." He cited Henry R. Schoolcraft as having mistranslated

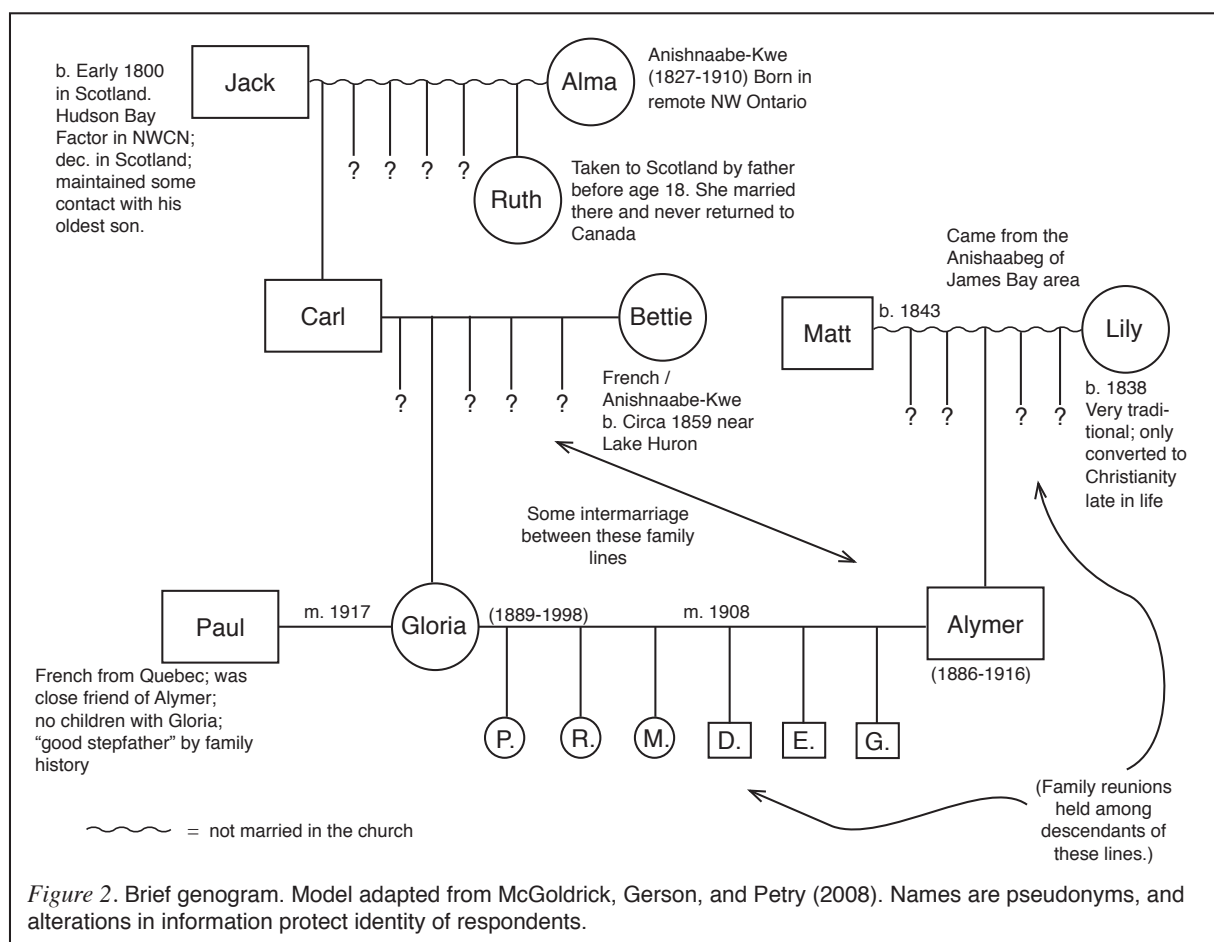
the word to give an incorrect meaning of “common people” (p. 56). Warren believed that the influence of early Jesuit contact with the Anishnaabe peoples contaminated their origin beliefs and made it difficult to separate out the “original from those portions which they have borrowed or imbibed from the whites” (p. 57). He contested the idea that they knew from early origin the existence of four races of humans (p. 58).

Warren inserted his own Christian beliefs into his work, gave a lengthy defense of the Bible as being authoritative in truth and history, and discussed the similarities between Bible origin stories and Anishnaabe origin stories. He attempted to reconcile them with the belief that the Anishnaabe are descendants from some of the ten lost tribes of Israel (p. 62). He believed that the rites of the Me-da-we Society, to which he was not initiated but knew of from information shared by Elders, “bear a strong likeness to the Ten Commandments revealed . . . to the children of Israel” (p. 67). He linked the Anishnaabe belief in “a multiplicity of spirits, which pervade all nature” (p. 63) to the similar Catholic belief in “interceding saints,” with everything being “subordinate to the one Great Spirit of good” (p. 63). He believed that the clan system itself derived from the stories of the Twelve Tribes of Israel (p. 71), but also acknowledged that there are many “stubborn facts and arguments against [these thoughts], the principal of which is probably their total variance in language” (p. 71).

Warren’s contribution to the body of knowledge on clan systems is significant, but it is clear that he believed “white” ways were superior, and Native peoples were “the Noble Savage” (p. xv). Although he declared his pride in his native heritage, he also clearly identified primarily

with his European heritage and training. Nonetheless, his work is a primary source on clan structure and history, and serves as a significant bridge between two worlds.

The historical background of family networks, relationships, and clan history provided a framework to assist me in moving from a general understanding of how the Anishnaabe clan system was structured, into the family context as they shared their efforts to revitalize their own family/clan identity. The following *Figure 2* illustrates the family origins of the participants with slight alterations in information to protect the identity of respondents:



Family members are primarily descended from 15–20 core families from northern Ontario Anishnaabe territories who have lived in the region for hundreds of years. Many of those family names can still be seen in the region. They live both on reserve and off reserve primarily in northern Ontario, but also across the North American continent. The family reunions, which began in the mid-1980s, sparked strong interest among family members and have grown in attendance over the years with the bi-annual structure begun by several descendants of Gloria and Aylmer, and a brother of Aylmer. These individuals are aging and many have died, leaving fewer older people to lead the reunions. The sense of family/clan identity that the current generations at the reunions have seems to be derived mainly from Gloria and Aylmer, with the clan identification following Aylmer's line.

The family/clan gatherings are formed by the descendants of three brothers (whose father, Aylmer, drowned sometime in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century), and some descendants of a nephew of Aylmer. The family knows only the names of Aylmer's parents, the region they lived in, and the fact that they converted to Christianity sometime in mid-1800. The mother (later known as Granny) of the three brothers was the descendant of a Scotsman who had been a Hudson Bay factor who lived with an *Anishnaabe-kwe* "country wife." He returned to Scotland with his youngest daughter, Ruth after the oldest of his six children married. Family members are still searching for more information about Ruth and what happened to her.

After Aylmer's death, Granny was left with the care of six young children, and remarried soon after her husband's death to a man from Quebec who, according to family stories, was a good provider and stepfather to her children. The three brothers married and had children, and their

knowledge of their clan was received primarily from their biological paternal uncles. The three brothers had a total of 26 children between them, and one of those children, E.Y.,<sup>8</sup> began the family/clan reunions in the mid-1980s following his decision to return to his culture and traditional Anishnaabe spiritual path as part of his healing journey. Now deceased, he was the first to begin researching the family tree, and his legacy is that of calling the first reunion, which started the revitalization of the family/clan, and teaching the participating family members about who they were, their clan and traditions. Family members who knew him well still remember him as a strong person, both physically when working, but also spiritually when he gave up drinking and returned to his cultural and traditional teachings to help him maintain his sobriety and live a good life. The family/clan reunions have been held every two years since their beginning.

### 2.3 Summary

Addressing the topic of location is crucial in a study of this nature. As the primary researcher I carry a responsibility to contextualize the process with a spirit of openness and transparency, and with respect for the First Nation family participants. All of us are located in relationship circles and have varying types of investment in the work itself, which necessitates situating the structures that influenced the work together, allowing us to move forward in a meaningful way in our search for better understandings of human resilience.

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<sup>8</sup>The name initials and some details are altered to protect confidentiality.

In this process of location we see the meaningfulness of gaining better understandings of the perceptions of participants. Their desire for more knowledge of their *mishkauziwin* is the underlying theme in a research process characterized by mutuality, and respect for identity and indigenous knowledge. Grounding ourselves in understanding who we are and where we come from builds trust, helps us navigate cultural differences and barriers, and facilitates a focus on topic and processes.

The significance of the Anishnaabe clan system provides foundational understanding of the Anishnaabe realities past and present, and contextualizes the family efforts to revitalize their identity. Understanding the complexity of issues pertaining to clan identity is an important part of the work, and is central to the family's on-going efforts to preserve and promote their own identity, and to know more about their *mishkauziwin*.



## Chapter 3

### 3 Background of the study

Exploring the background of the study necessitates a look at resilience studies in general as well as looking at the body of knowledge on resilience within First Nations contexts.

Narrowing the viewpoint further allows examination of systemic issues pertaining to Anishnaabe clan history, trauma, loss and adaptation in relationship to community and cultural realities—the ecological view of resilience. Resilience is seen as a process, not a characteristic, and is contrasted to processes of recovery, survival and adaptation. The chapter concludes with a brief look at issues of language, identity and culture, and a summary of the background of the study.

#### 3.1 A look at the general body of knowledge on resilience

The term *resilience*, a metaphor describing the ability “of a material or system to return to equilibrium after a displacement” (Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, B., Wyche, & Pfefferbaum, R., 2008, p. 127), originated from the language of the natural sciences. It refers to the isotropic (equal direction) quality of rebound or elasticity in a biological system, or the ability of a material to absorb or recover energy after impact. From such diverse fields as social work, biology, physics, ecology, IT networks, gaming, economics, geography, and psychology, the concept of resilience has been applied to mechanical, biological, and social systems alike. The development of general systems theory, modern neuroscience and technology, and multidisciplinary approaches to the study of resilience, has opened new vistas in understanding

ways by which biological and social structures contribute to resilience phenomena (Curtis & Cicchetti, 2003). This creates challenging opportunities for multiple levels of analyzing the topic of resilience.

A primary concern that emerges from mainstream studies is a focus on risk and adaptation. The instrumental focus of many of the studies on resilience comes from a human desire to fix what is broken, help what is hurt, and change what is dysfunctional; however, that implies a generally acceptable way of defining *fix*, *broken*, *hurt*, and *dysfunctional*. In actuality, multiple factors of culture, value-orientation, individual characteristics, environmental systems, historical constructs, and political realities influence definitions of—and exercise of—judgments. As society evolves, changes, and creates its reality, social values and philosophies guide concepts of adaptation or maladaptation. Sometimes mainstream viewpoints and focus obliterates or ignores other perspectives.

### 3.1.1 Risk and protective factors

In psychosocial research on resilience from human studies fields (e.g., social work, psychology, education, and sociology), and the medical field, focus has been on identifying risk and protective factors operating for individuals. There is also focus on community resilience, and the factors that support community resilience following trauma of various sorts, or medical problems that affect specific populations.

Much of the research looks at interventions that will promote resilience, well-being, acceptable social functioning, recovery from trauma, and adaptation in general. The clinically driven focus

on assets, and risk and protective factors is strongly geared toward identifying specific outcomes defined as desirable by the larger society. Protective factors modulate the effects of loss and trauma by shaping risk effects, and move adaptation efforts toward a positive direction (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000, p. 858). This two-dimensional construct of resilience has the following characteristics: (a) it is strength-based, not focused on negative outcomes, (b) the emphasis is on prevention of maladaptation, and on antecedents to positive outcomes, and (c) there is a commitment to understanding processes underlying effects of “vulnerability and protective factors” (p. 861). Luthar and Cicchetti emphasize that resilience does not mean a personality trait, but is rather evidence of an adaptation in a positive direction. They caution against concluding “that if only children were able to make ‘appropriate’ attributions they would then display resilient adaptation” (p. 863). In other words, if children simply behave properly they can be resilient and adapt, which does not necessarily follow.

What is defined as a risk factor in one set of circumstances may actually be a protective factor in another set of circumstances. In my clinical work over the years I have observed how individuals in the process of successfully navigating a life-threatening challenge can develop skills of compartmentalization that help them to function socially and emotionally. The ability to compartmentalize is a psychological skill that is adaptive in extremely stressful circumstances. If that ability becomes a habituated and generalized aspect of the individual’s identity, and every minor and major stressful event in that person’s life is instinctively handled by the psychological mechanism of compartmentalization, he or she could appear to be highly functional yet experience psychological “splitting” and internal disconnection from emotions

and memories. The consequent restrictions on that person's inner functioning, resulting from emotional truncation, may serve him or her well if in an oppressive situation, yet there will be deficits in social and emotional abilities restricting that individual's ability to live a full and rich life.

### 3.1.2 Trauma, loss, and adaptation

Victims of abuse, war, oppression and violence in any form will respond to their situation adaptively both behaviorally and emotionally. The biological makeup of a human being is primed to respond to loss and fear in such a way that any event registering as threat or danger will trigger innate responses designed to protect life. In certain circumstances, even passivity can be an active choice in response to powerlessness. The human organism will make automatic choices about what is perceived to be life-protective responses. The shut down or activation of perceptions of pain and other psychological and biological functions at the moment of trauma is a natural and normal self-preservation response. The perceptual range of evaluation of the external circumstances may alter as time goes on, but if the traumatic event is a chronic and sustained reality from which there is no escape, adaptation can take on non-adaptive characteristics of self-preservation in order to avoid being stuck in repeated alarm cycles that have serious biological, cognitive, and emotional consequences.

Because much of psychology's knowledge about resilience has come from studies of individuals who have sought treatment to help them cope with trauma and loss, some researchers believe the view of resilience has been skewed or underestimated (Bonanno, 2004).

Trauma therapists have strong urges to help their suffering clients, but Bonanno believes that

the research from this field has shown that the therapists “often ignored and underestimated resilience” (p. 22) or, in other words, did not perceive the strength-based adaptations of the clients. His article is a literature review of studies in grief work, treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and research focused on a narrow spectrum of severe problems. He concludes the effectiveness of treatment in cases of loss and trauma is disputable and believes that there has been a blurring of distinctions between processes of recovery and processes of resilience. He believes it is problematic when researchers lump resilient and recovering individuals together without distinguishing between them, and writes:

[Researchers] risk making the faulty assumption that resilient people must engage in the same coping processes as do exposed individuals who struggle with but eventually recover from more intense trauma symptoms [and] many individuals exposed to violent or life-threatening events will show a genuine resilience that should not be interfered with or undermined by clinical intervention. (p. 22)

Bonanno cites a study (Bonanno, Wortman et al., 2002, as cited in Bonanno, 2004) on bereaved individuals where it was demonstrated that most subjects showed genuine resilience to the loss of a partner and exhibited no signs of adverse adjustment. The experiences of resilient individuals “were transient rather than enduring and did not interfere with their ability to continue to function in other areas of their lives, including the capacity for positive affect” (p. 24). The resilience process of grieving individuals was differentiated from the recovery process following the bereavement. The trauma of loss can be experienced without symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or prolonged distress appearing in the recovery process.

While the evidence of delayed Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is firmly established (p. 24), follow-up studies of survivors of major disasters indicate that the majority of affected people recover without developing overwhelming problems (p. 25). Bonanno writes:

Because so little attention has been devoted to resilience, when loss and trauma theorists have looked for resilience, they have tended to look in the wrong places. Indeed, the assumption that all adults exposed to loss or to potentially traumatic events experience prolonged distress and disruptions in function goes hand in hand with the belief that resilience must be rare. (p. 25)

He believes that resilience is common, that dysfunction must be viewed with a deeper understanding of resilience, and that researchers should not view resilience in the same way they view chronic dysfunction. The evidence suggests that resilient responses to trauma have often been misunderstood and/or missed by the standard ways by which individuals' resilience has been studied in the psychological research of the topic (pp. 26-27).

### 3.1.3 The ecological view: community and cultural contexts

The ecological model of community resilience provides a promising guide toward examining resilience processes. The mainstream ecological model demonstrates that human functioning “is continually produced, sustained and changed by interactions between individual and context” (Schoon & Bartley, 2008, p. 25). These researchers reviewed longitudinal studies in England over the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century looking at over 40,000 individuals who overcame adversity resulting from poverty. The research findings indicated that those people who

overcame adversity resulting from poverty were characterized by: (a) positive school experience, (b) belief in their own capability, (c) participation in social networks and with a stable, supportive family life, and (d) motivated with positive future aspirations (p. 25).

These findings lend validity to the authors' position that supports in the wider social context are crucial to the ability of people to overcome adversity, or, in other words, to adapt in a resilient fashion to difficult circumstances. They conclude that social investment to improve living standards builds protective factors in the larger social network surrounding the family and individual.

Harvey<sup>9</sup> (2007) conducted a literature review on studies of community trauma, and notes that there is considerable attention in community psychology to the influence of culture on the context, meaning, and interpretation of trauma and how it is mediated by cultural contexts. Resilience is seen to be occurring normally more than impairment, and is framed in terms of absence of debilitating psychological symptoms that impair personal and social functioning. She cites evidence that trauma at times generates "posttraumatic growth" which surpasses that of prior functioning (p. 7) and suggests that resilience be defined as multidimensional. Her view of resilience in trauma survivors has five premises: (a) Resilience is transactional and contextual, (b) it is multidimensional, (c) interventions to promote resilience need to focus on the relationship between person and context, (d) nuances of culture and context may need to be challenged to promote meaningful interventions, and (e) any lasting impact of interventions

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<sup>9</sup> Affiliated with the Department of Psychiatry at Harvard University, Harvey is a former board member of the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies. Address: Mary R. Harvey, PhD, The Victims of Violence Program, 26 Central Street, Somerville, MA 02143

depends on whether or not they become embedded in a community context (p. 18-19). She and her colleague, Pratyusha Tummalanarra, point to the “need for a theoretical framework which can account for wide variations in individual expressions of psychological trauma, trauma recovery, and resilience” (Harvey & Tummalanarra, 2007, p. 2). Clearly, multicultural issues will play a significant role in the manifestation and perception of resilience in indigenous contexts (Wong, T.P. & Wong, L.C.J., 2006).

The Danish psychologist Elsass (1992) recognizes that one-dimensional views and approaches are inadequate to understand community trauma and resilient, or adaptive, responses and thus has sought to address the cultural aspects of understanding resilience, both individual and community. He writes:

Survival is contingent on the way in which each single local community defines itself in relation to the larger society of which it is a part. When a people tries to survive with its own culture and identity intact, it is dependent on being able to achieve the subtle balance between not allowing itself to be swallowed up by and integrated into the larger society on the one hand and not letting itself be isolated from it on the other hand. In other words, [in] a balance between integration and isolation . . . [Those] who have been able to survive the best are those with a historical consciousness that goes back to the time before colonization and conquest. Thus their identity is based on a culture made up of more than struggle and resistance. (p. 107)

His work with the Arhuaco Indians in Colombia and the Motilon Indians in Venezuela focused on identifying resilient aspects of their culture that allowed them to establish themselves as a



unique people with an identity that extended into past and future, ensuring group and individual survival.

A significant threat to survival of unique populations is the loss of historical connectedness through family and social determinants (e.g. language) of individual and group identity. Elsass (1992), and Davis, W. (2009), see this problem as a looming threat worldwide, and not just in ethnic minority cultures. In the populations Elsass (1992) studied, maintaining family genealogy preserved a sense of connectedness to the history and culture that defined group identity. Resilient ways of preserving identity in the context of “terror, oppression, and population decimation” (p. xi) may manifest as efforts to preserve the past and the freedom to be distinctive. Factors of resiliency may be invisible, or misunderstood as dysfunctional, for those who fail to perceive the cultural contexts, and may even be present in the bi-directional ways by which the influence of Aboriginal life enters, and alters, the mainstream dominant world (Sioui, 1992).

Kai Erikson (1976), in his ethnographic study on community resilience following disaster (a flood), emphasized the importance of locating disaster survivors “in the larger sweep of history and on the wider social and cultural map” (p. 48). Without an understanding of this context the story of what happened after the disaster could not be understood. He developed a concept he named “axes of variation” in the Appalachian culture experiencing the disaster, which allowed him to make sense of what his research found. A year and a half after the flood, 93% of the survivors studied (615 adults and children) were found to have an identifiable emotional disorder with a range of debilitating psychiatric symptoms (p. 156). In addition, he found that

survivors experienced a profound loss of networked relationships, a sense of their community being suspended in disaster, and a feeling that they had been victims of an occupation more than a rescue following the flood (p. 201). Particularly the children were left with the feeling that not even the self could be trusted, and that there was no safety or security around them. This is a different picture of survival following trauma than would be expected in light of later studies which show that resilience is fairly normative (Bonanno, 2004; Davis, Cook & Cohen, 2005; Harvey, 2007; Masten, 2001), and is accounted for by the cultural context of that region of Appalachia at the time.

Cultural values and practices might need to be challenged in the process of helping individuals and communities recover from trauma (Harvey, 2007). Erickson (1976) developed his axes of variation to indicate what aspects of Appalachian cultural values impeded recovery and would need to be changed to assist recovery. The axes of variation that he identified are: (a) tradition vs. personal freedom, (b) self-assertion vs. resignation, (c) individuation vs. other-oriented, (d) ability vs. disability, and (e) dependence needs vs. independence needs (pp. 84–88). In light of a chronic state of disaster that people have lived with in the Appalachian region since settlers first arrived (p. 132), the social and cultural norms served to create a situation where the people simply were not able to respond to the major secondary trauma of the flood. When their environment changed to the point where they were powerless to negotiate a range of movement across the axes of variation, they were unable to rebound. Erikson found that “time can work its special therapy only if it acts in concert with a nurturing communal setting” (p. 155). Appalachian culture in their region had functioned in such a way as to keep them in a

frozen state of trauma response, truncating abilities to create nurturing communal settings for survivors.

### 3.1.4 Resilience as process

Lifton (1993) describes a psychological process of “controlled dissociation” under duress and addresses the question of whether or not history is a “blind and relentlessly destructive force or reliable safety net” (p. 132). He looks at historical traumas of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki nuclear bombings, the Viet Nam war, the U.S. slavery institution, Puritan attacks on Native Americans in the 1600s, the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century lynching throughout the United States of minority peoples, and references Kai Erikson’s 1976 flood study. He makes a claim that modern psychological processes have created an internal multiplicity in self-identity, which he calls a “Protean Self,” that is able to transform following disaster. While his writing is philosophical and not based on empirical studies, he attempts to synthesize the work of others such as Erik Erikson, James Hillman, Carl Jung, Sigmund Freud, Pierre Janet, and research from scholars at the Center for the Study of Human Violence. He believes that “species consciousness is precarious,” requiring processes of connectedness to the larger human community to achieve transformation and resilience, calling this process the “protean path to connection” (p. 231).

Norris et al. (2008) considers resilience to be a process that individuals and communities enact in the presence of networked adaptability. They write: “resilience rests on both the resources themselves and the dynamic attributes of those resources” (p. 135). In their review of the community resilience literature, they exclude communities ravaged by war because war

stressors “unfold over time” and thus the dynamics are too complex to be included in their model. They describe a process that does not necessarily lead to stabilization, but does lead to adaptation facilitating individual and community change over time. This resilience process of adaptation and adjustment evolves through networks of transactions and relationships (p. 144).

The view of resilience as an adjustment process is important, and is compatible with the research in individualistic settings, where there is a caution against seeing resilience as a character trait. Rutter (1990) notes that research has now moved to focus on the task sets involved in adjustment processes. It is clear that most resilience research focuses primarily on the individual, on risk factors, and on vulnerability factors and individual responses even when the research is effectively taking into account demographics and environmental factors. Rutter believes that “Resilience is concerned with individual variations in response to risk factors” (p. 183), and notes that, as circumstances fluctuate, adaptation processes and risk factors change (p. 184). He comments on the literature regarding the buffering of supports and protective factors, emphasizing that issues of vulnerability and protection cannot exist in the variable studied, but can only exist in a process (p. 185), which often includes a turning point of sorts. By emphasizing developmental trajectories and other turning points and pivotal events in peoples’ lives, he attempts to focus attention on the process of adaptation and protection, rather than events or variables.

Fromma Walsh (2002) provides an overview of her own work in clinical prevention efforts with at-risk families. She identifies “the key processes that foster resiliency” (p. 130) as being related to the significance of relationship processes. Her work focuses on identifying and

strengthening these key processes of resilience through shared family efforts to respond and cope in adverse circumstances. Walsh relies on ecological and developmental frameworks in her focus on adaptation processes, and works with a “multisystemic” approach in evaluating difficulties and designing interventions (p. 131). Nine key aspects of family functioning, based on her research, are as follows: (a) making sense of adversity, (b) promoting positive outlook, (c) fostering transcendence and spirituality, (d) flexibility or capacity to change, (e), connectedness through mutual support, (f) social and economic resources, (g) clarity in word and action, (h) emotional openness, and (i) collaborative problem solving (p. 132). Through her work with Kosovar professionals and families who have survived war, she has found that the families’ identification with strong values of the culture is helpful in overcoming adversity (p. 136).

### 3.2 A look at the current body of knowledge on resilience in First Nations contexts

It is especially challenging to discuss the concept of resilience when applied in a social context such as that which exists for Native peoples in North America. The colonization experience and the issue of genocide remain the “elephant in the room” in much of the discussion of problematized issues concerning Native peoples and communities (Denham, 2008; Duran & Duran, 1995; Evans-Campbell, 2008; Hart, M. A., 2002; LaBoucane-Benson, 2005; Waldram, 2004). The elephant in the room is largely unrecognized because the holocaust of Aboriginal peoples on this continent has few remnants in the collective memory of mainstream North America. At the same time, it is central to the core collective memories of Aboriginal peoples. Literature on the topic of historical trauma of indigenous peoples is similar to the extensive

literature on the Jewish Holocaust (Yellow Horse Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998), yet this literature, in contrast, is relatively invisible in spite of the vastly higher numbers of population killed among the indigenous peoples in this hemisphere. What keeps the historical wound particularly raw is the ongoing slaughter of indigenous peoples in South and Central America and theft of land and resources. Add that to the impact on populations of deaths from chronic diseases directly related to colonization (e.g., alcoholism and diabetes) and it is apparent why recovery is such a challenge, and examples of resilience, survival and recovery are so poignant.

The Aboriginal and former slave societies Elsass (1992) studied had a historic legacy of the obliteration of their basic human rights by external forces. Various forms of violence had perpetuated conditions of disenfranchisement for many generations (p. 163). This situation is similar throughout North America for Aboriginal peoples, reinforced by institutionalized racism and “microaggressions” (Evans-Campbell, 2008) embedded in social, economic and governmental structures.

This historical context is integral to any discussion of the concept of resilience of Aboriginal peoples. A “psychology of survival” becomes a matrix not visible to the larger society, which shapes identity, belief systems, and social functions. Using a psychology of survival perspective when examining questions regarding resilience provides a different viewpoint than an approach that only views pathology, or dysfunction, in the “Other.” In other words, what may be labeled as dysfunctional from one perspective can be seen as quite functional from another perspective. Taking this viewpoint allows entrance into the world of survival, a world of strength despite serious difficulties and dysfunctions, a world that is usually opaque to the

outsider, invisible even when closely proximate. The insider view can emerge when the outsider steps aside from a stance of expertise and engages in the research collaboratively, thus placing discussions of indigenous knowledge of resilience “within a historical process of change” (Castellano, 2000, p.21).

Some of the research conducted on the topic of resilience in Aboriginal contexts also seems to meet a broader need among Aboriginal peoples to change the paradigm of being in a subjected position in relationship to the larger society. Aboriginal peoples have a long history of being subjects in research that has little relevance to the concerns of the people or community where the research is taking place. “Giving back” to the community and helping it survive is a necessary function of research in order to maintain a functional relationship with the community.

### 3.2.1 Historical trauma, survival, and resilience

The topic of historical trauma does not necessarily enter into an examination of resilience processes as a matter of routine, although studies that shed light on the subject of resilience in First Nations contexts usually provide foundational information regarding historical trauma.

The following representative quote indicates the seriousness with which Aboriginal researchers approach the study of sustainable resilience practices in the face of the massive community trauma and historical trauma faced by Canadian indigenous peoples in their territories: “We as a people have to walk away from our colonial experience, from marginalization, and from the sense that we are “without” and walk back into the strengths and values that sustained and guided our ancestors” (Wesley-Esquimaux & Snowball, 2010, p. 393).

Resilience researchers working collaboratively in Aboriginal settings often focus on aspects of life other than dysfunction and pathology so as not to contribute to imbalanced and stereotyped understandings of Aboriginal communities (Goforth, 2007; LaBoucane-Benson, 2005).

Goforth's review of the literature on Aboriginal healing methods highlights the collaborative approach in research. While her focus was on literature surrounding the Indian Residential Schools trauma in Canada, she found that therapeutic strategies in the studies she reviewed addressed a range of issues for participants (Castellano, Archibald, & DeGagné, 2008). The literature available on resilience of Aboriginal or First Nations peoples was scant in her opinion (p. 11). Like other authors (Denham, 2008; Duran & Duran, 1995; LaBoucane-Benson, 2005; Waldram, 2004), she notes that Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder responses arising from conditions of prolonged oppression can include disintegration of personal and social function, which needs to be taken into consideration whenever looking at the issue of resilience in Aboriginal contexts.

Traumatized populations in general can lack normal physical and psychosocial development, have high rates of substance abuse, violence, poverty, lack of parenting skills, suicide, legal trouble, unemployment, low educational achievement, and have a poor sense of identity (Herman, 1992/1997). Much of the literature Goforth (2007) reviewed focused on applying Aboriginal healing methods to these issues in culturally based contexts. LaBoucane-Benson (2005) integrates a deeper ecological and historical analysis of the conditions challenging First Nation families and the bleak picture facing many (p.7). Aboriginal communities with clear



evidence of strong cultural identity and continuity, and culturally supportive practices experience low youth suicidality or none at all (Lalonde, 2003).

Gone's (2009a) examination of the experiences of clients and staff at a Native American healing lodge places the healing discourse in the context of community-based and culturally-based strategies for healing traumatized peoples. This is viewed as essential for the successful reorganization of individual and community functioning from trauma to recovery and resilience, and a case is made that this approach leads to evidence-based treatment principles for resolving trauma in Aboriginal settings. The article does not specifically address the clinic's use of certain mainstream-based healing approaches, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy strategies or psychiatric medication.

While there is evidence from this literature that consideration of risk and protective factors of resilience enter into the study of resilience in response to trauma in Aboriginal contexts, the greater focus is on the cultural components of Aboriginal life that have contributed to the strength and survival of Aboriginal peoples in general. The identification of key cultural identity characteristics is seen as an important part of understanding the survival of oppression and trauma, both historical and current (Duran & Duran, 1995; Elsass, 1992; Lalonde, 2003; Waldram, 2004). The use of case studies, surveys and predominately qualitative approaches is seen with only occasional positivistic studies applied to the topic (Dell, Dell, & Hopkins, 2005, pp. 6-10). Aboriginal research concerned with identifying and describing aspects of community, economic, and cultural factors, and healing/treatment approaches for trauma demonstrate movement towards healthy and sustainable development for Aboriginal

individuals and communities (Alcántara & Gone, 2007; Gone, 2009a; Wesley-Esquimaux & Snowball, 2010). All of the studies cited here evidence some effort to conduct research from a strengths-based approach as opposed to focusing primarily on pathology.

### 3.2.2 Cultural identity issues

By the 1990s and earlier, Aboriginal scholars and professionals, and others were examining cultural resilience, seen as a new term applied to Aboriginal contexts, in both Canada and the United States. A great deal of the work on resilience comes from educational settings and venues (HeavyRunner & Morris, 1997; Battiste, 1998; Mykota & Schwean, 2006; van der Woerd & Cox, 2003). The literature expands to focus on specific health-related concerns and culturally relevant treatment approaches (Gone, 2004; 2009a; 2009b; Iwasaki & Bartlett, 2006; Richmond, Ross, & Egeland, 2007; Walters & Simoni, 2002), and more specifically, on mental health and addictions treatment, including family treatment (Dell, Dell & Hopkins, 2005; Duran & Duran, 1995; LaBoucane-Benson, 2005; Waldram, 2004; Wesley-Esquimaux & Snowball, 2010; Whitbeck, Chen, Hoyt, & Adams, 2004). Other writers focus on resilience in community or economic venues, and policy areas (Elsass, 1992; Freeman & Lee, 2007; Helin, 2006; Jenson, 2007; Lalonde, 2006; Scarpino, 2007; Wadden, 2008; Wuttunee, 2004). The above literature addresses issues of research and cultural knowledge paradigms either as a key component of the piece, or as an adjunct recognition of the issue. Wuttunee regards the legacy of mainstream research on Aboriginal peoples as reflecting a “marginalization of research subjects from the research process” (p. 5), again reflecting the primacy of the importance of collaborative research approaches in Aboriginal contexts.

Most research utilizing indigenous models of research is qualitative in nature, incorporating participatory research methods to allow for greater community access and collaboration. Three exceptions in this literature review are Richmond, Ross, and Egeland's (2007) study on social support and health, Mykota and Schwean's (2006) study, which attempts to identify moderating factors of psychosocial problems in an educational setting, and van der Woerd and Cox's (2003) study on educational status and risk and protective factors in First Nations students.

Richmond, Ross, and Egeland (2007) used multivariate logistic regression analysis of data on 31,625 adults who participated in the 2001 Aboriginal Peoples Survey on self-reported health status. Their results "validate population health approaches for better understanding patterns of indigenous health" (p. 1832). The study looked at social support and connection to community, and sought to identify indicators of thriving among Aboriginal men and women. They found that self-reported thriving health was higher in men than in women, but that more women than men self-reported high emotional and social support (p. 1832). The researchers did not look for indications of specific cultural practices or culturally specific identity factors supporting resilience, but considered the factor of disconnections between indigenous peoples and traditional environments as a contribution to disruptions in their health (p. 1832).

Mykota and Schwean (2006) emphasize that "Resilience is not a personality trait or characteristic of the individual but a two-dimensional construct composed of adversity and positive adaptation" (p. 5). They develop a model that identifies factors that allow for "effective remediation" of troubled students, and promote the school setting as a primary

location for reducing risk factors for maladjustment and helping students “become resilient to a negative psychosocial developmental outcome” (p. 14). Their report indicates that cultural identity and positive school experience are strong protective factors.

Van der Woerd and Cox (2003) questioned a small sample size of 131 youth from one community in British Columbia. Their quantitative study was limited in its ability to connect with the community in a meaningful way or to reveal useful knowledge. One community member, an Elder, stated, “We don’t like you to come and take information from the Natives” (p. 218). Although the authors describe appropriate methods of initiating the research with the community, and the Band Council provided an approval letter for the research, it is not at all clear that anyone in the community requested or invested in the research. The authors state, “It should be noted that despite negative attitudes, this project was widely accepted and promoted, even by Elders in the community” (p. 218), but the acceptance level remains undocumented.

Iwasaki and Bartlett (2006) comment on limited efforts “made to directly explore the potential usefulness of conceptual basis of stress-coping among Aboriginal peoples” (p. 17). In their study, which focused on a health issue, they did not promote a culturally based treatment framework, yet allowed cultural strengths identification to emerge. Other researchers specifically identified cultural components as a protective strategy, or sought to identify cultural factors promoting resilience, or historical loss factors detracting from resilience (Gone, 2009a; Stout & Kipling, 2003). Increasingly, researchers have begun to acknowledge the importance of examining resilience within Aboriginal frameworks from the perspectives of Aboriginal peoples (Dell, Dell, & Hopkins, 2005; Freeman & Lee, 2007; HeavyRunner &

Morris, 1997; LaBoucane-Benson, 2005; Lalonde, 2006; Scarpino, 2007; Whitbeck et al., 2004).

### 3.2.3 The ecological view in Aboriginal context

Current literature on the ecological view of resilience arising from within Aboriginal contexts highlights efforts of cultural restoration as Aboriginal communities and peoples work to rebalance inequities and regain health (Helin, 2006; Lalonde, 2006; Wadden, 2008; Walters & Simoni, 2002; Wuttunee, 2004). Aboriginal communities “are by no means always in crisis . . . there resides a potentially powerful energy that could fire and sustain action to confront the challenges of healing and struggle” (Freeman & Lee, 2007, p.116). Research on resilience in Aboriginal contexts serves to reach out and call forth from communities and individuals those cultural aspects that promote strength and survival. In this sense, the research is instrumental, serving a function beyond the traditional roles of basic research in academic settings.

Goforth (2007) notes that most of the literature she reviewed called for “a holistic approach in addressing healing and health of Aboriginal peoples, supporting the ideology that problems cannot be addressed in isolation from each other” (p. 15). Traditional cultural practices and spiritual teachings (e.g., the Medicine Wheel, which is systemic in nature) are evident in much of the research she reviewed. She notes a scarcity of research examining the blending of Aboriginal approaches with predominantly Western models of healing (p. 20).

LaBoucane-Benson (2005) asserts that the strongest primary evidence of resilience is in the reality of the survival of Aboriginal peoples (pp. 6–8). Her writing reflects a general belief in

Aboriginal communities that cultural identity is a key factor of survival and that it translates into resilience. This is often seen as both an individual and collective characteristic, other than a process. The interchangeability of these concepts is seldom fleshed out or specified, despite the research-based evidence that resilience is a process, as opposed to a static or achieved condition or characteristic.

LaBoucane-Benson (2005) works to put forward “a theoretical framework of Aboriginal family resilience” (p. 1) and presents a comprehensive literature review of the mainstream literature on resilience and the body of literature documenting the impact of intergenerational trauma on Aboriginal families. Iwasaki & Bartlett (2006) were able to identify in their participants “a core meaning of stress-coping” (p. 15) embedded in “survival spirit” and a personal sense of resilience arising from “collective strengths” (pp. 20–21). Johnson (1995) conducted a qualitative research project on 15 ethnically diverse families in the United States and identified resilience mechanisms similar to the core values that are a vital part of Aboriginal communities across the continent (pp.316–324).<sup>10</sup> Their findings reflect the broad belief in the strength of family and community as a key factor in survival and resilience, reflecting what has been found in the larger body of knowledge on resiliency in general—social support and healthy embedding in a supportive community is a powerful protective factor in the face of risk and loss. The literature appears to support the understanding that factors of cultural identification are protective, and cultural revitalization efforts are meaningful interventions in protecting

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<sup>10</sup>The author does not take into unique consideration the historical trauma in the two Plains Indian communities represented, and includes their experiences with Hispanic and African American experiences (both communities which have also been the subject of much violence and trauma historically). All the families selected were from a clinical population and the study was approached with a strengths-based perspective.

against problems stemming from historical loss and discrimination (LaBoucane-Benson, 2005; Lalonde, 2006; Whitbeck et al., 2004).

Lalonde (2006) reviewed results of data from 1987–2000 on the 196 First Nations communities in British Columbia regarding youth suicide rates. The research showed that the risk of suicide for First Nations youth in Canada is 5–20 times higher than for non-Aboriginal youth, but also showed a high variability between various First Nations communities (p. 59), with half of the 196 communities having no completed youth suicides during the 14-year study (p. 60).

Lalonde writes:

It is only among those who have entirely lost the thread of their own continuity that we find increased suicide risk. If one can mount an argument of any kind—whether Essentialist or Narrative, simple or complex, one is insulated from risk. . . .Our claim is that just as the loss of personal continuity puts individual young persons at risk, the loss of cultural continuity puts whole cultural groups at risk. (p. 65)

Lalonde's evidence shows that for those communities whose cultural identities and cultural continuity were firmly established (e.g., fluency in the First Nation language, and so forth), the rates of youth suicide were non-existent. This supports findings that cultural factors are a powerful protective factor, which promotes resilience in First Nations contexts. Alcántara and Gone's (2007) research on resilience within a transactional-ecological framework supports this finding.

Both personal and collective factors appear relevant in examination of resilience in First Nations communities. Helin (2006) examines Aboriginal communities in Canada, the United States, and New Zealand, looking primarily at areas around economics and self-sufficiency, and found evidence of self-reliance and successful self-governance. Helin considers these examples to be indicators of survival and resilience. Wuttunee (2004) analyzes specific cultural aspects of Aboriginal peoples that contribute to success in business, and calls for ecologically sustainable ways of life and commerce, based on a long-term partnership with the earth that Aboriginal peoples traditionally upheld. Wuttunee believes that Aboriginal development models foster resilience, success, and survival beyond simply counting profit and loss, and goods and services, but also strengthen holistic cultural traditions (p. 19).

Wadden's (2008) narrative and journalistic approach covered Aboriginal communities from British Columbia to Labrador, looking at entrepreneurs, RCMP officers, consultants, mental health and addiction treatment professionals, and community members. Wadden finds evidence of success and resilience, and highlights the pressing needs overwhelming many Aboriginal communities in Canada. The approach is more pessimistic than that of the family researcher LaBoucane-Benson (2005) who sees evidence of emergent order with an approach to studying resilience in Aboriginal families. LaBoucane-Benson identifies emergent patterns of "bonadaptation" alongside patterns of maladaptation (p. 14). Jensen's (2007) study focuses primarily on policy issues in the United States and advocates the use of a risk and resilience framework as a way of conveying pertinent research information to policy makers. All of these authors call for policy changes on a governmental level and express concern that research



findings seldom seem to make it into the formation of social and economic policies affecting Aboriginal communities.

#### 3.2.4 Resilience process vs. recovery, survival, and adaptation processes

At this point we need to separate out the differences in these processes. Just as resilience is a process and not a characteristic, it can also be said that survival is a process and not a static condition. Adaptation processes are fluid and ongoing, and humans can be said to be in a consistent and constant flow of adapting to ever-changing social and environmental conditions. The flow of this adaptive process is not linear, but circular, tangential, spiral, often chaotic and characterized by recursive forays into earlier levels of functioning, and frequently evidencing sudden bursts of surpassing accomplishments in the face of great difficulty.

Resilience implies that a former condition existed prior to a rupture of normalcy, and that a process can take place that leads to a system rebounding to a prior level that can be discretely identified, specified and recreated. Recovery can be said to be those aspects of the process of rebounding which regains or reclaims something that had been lost, injured or destroyed.

Survival carries a connotation of continued existence of something that was subjected to forces of destruction, harm, or change which removed normally existing conditions and functioning.

“We are still here” is a refrain often heard in the context of peoples who have gone through experiences of severe community or individual trauma whether that results from genocide, a holocaust, a natural disaster, or the cumulative effect of destructive events that pile up sequentially leading to difficulties that overwhelm normal functioning.

Resilience, adaptation, recovery and survival are not words for concepts that can be used interchangeably. Each has its own discrete meaning and implication in language usage, and confusion can result when unclear and imprecise usage is carelessly applied to a discussion of resilience processes. The common vernacular in English language usage can lead the average person to believe that a person can have a personal resilient characteristic imparting to them a special ability to survive, recover from, and/or adapt to a severe blow to psyche, body, soul and community. This is not necessarily the case. An exploration of the topic of resilience in the context of my research will require a careful treatment of these concept differences, attending to language, meaning, and the thoughts, feelings and beliefs of the family members participating in the study. The survival, recovery, or adaptation of a human being or human system does not imply an *exact rebounding* to a prior condition equating to actual restoration of the original state.

The challenge in discussing the subject of resilience arises from the lack of universally accepted and understood clarity and specificity of the concept of resilience. To take aspects or forms of recovery and survival as evidence of human resilience is to attribute to resilience a quality that is not implied by the original meaning of the word “resilience” as conceptualized in the biological sciences—rebounding to an original state of being.

### 3.3 Systemic issues of studying perceptions of *mishkauziwin* with an Anishnaabe family

Anishnaabe people today, as do indigenous peoples everywhere, face conditions of a world where issues of economic, social, and political viability, along with the environmental integrity

of their territories and rapidly advancing technological realities, directly impinge on the survival of their identity. Aboriginal identity remains “complex, evolving, and situational” (Schouls, 2003, p. 121), and is related to sovereignty issues and self-government. Maintaining cultural identity is at the heart of much of Aboriginal politics today (Schouls, 2003), but this concern is one of which most Canadian citizens remain ignorant, and there is often puzzlement or hostility regarding the identity issues facing Aboriginal peoples across Canada.

These issues, and especially those regarding self-governance and a distinct cultural identity, are very much a contemporary concern in Anishnaabe political and collective life, directly intersecting with concerns related to citizenship, land, and resources (Nabigon, 2003, p. 288). Family members participating in this study are involved in the larger discussions on these topics in various ways. As the family works to identify their *mishkauziwin* and how they revitalize the family with strong clan connections, they address the core of what it means to be Anishnaabe in the modern world, and to be not only strong, but also resilient. As they seek to understand what strength and resilience mean to them they place themselves at the core of contemporary issues with implications for the larger Anishnaabe nation.

The researcher discussing Anishnaabe history has a challenging task, particularly if that researcher is not Anishnaabe, not a historian by training, and not directly involved in contemporary Anishnaabe political life; therefore, it is necessary to rely on the work of academics that are well versed in historical and contemporary Aboriginal life. Schouls (2003) focuses on contemporary Aboriginal populations living on reserve but points out that it is a mistake to perceive Aboriginal identity and self-determination from the assumptions of

contemporary culture-based and nation-based approaches. Schouls asks whether identity strivings “today possess complex, layered, and overlapping political identities in which national affiliation may be but one element?” (p. ix), a question informed by the framework of historical realities. Those historical realities include the complex and fluid Anishnaabe identity of the past via the intricate social and economic structures of the clan system. Issues pertaining to clan identity are an integral part of the question examined by this study.

### 3.3.1 Language, identity, and culture

In Chapter One, I stated that the role of clan identity as a component of resilience processes is rarely seen in research on resilience in Aboriginal contexts. As we see from the brief history offered here, the intentional destruction of the moiety system, which was the central societal organizational structure, was a significant aspect of the attempted destruction of the Anishnaabe peoples. Is it possible that the clan system as an organizational structural concept is resilient and has potential to be restored to some semblance of a former level of function? How much of this aspect of identity and culture can be shown to be a meaningful component of the family/clan revitalization efforts, and does that indicate the presence of *mishkauziwin*, or survival and adaptation? How are identity, culture and language manifested in family/clan revitalization?

The phrase “picking up one’s bundle” (spoken of in family/clan gatherings during traditional teaching times) implies a meaning of return to ceremonies and understandings of traditional sacred items in the bundle, such as pipes, feathers, rattles, colors of the Medicine Wheel, sage, cedar, tobacco and sweetgrass, and other items, and their implications for individual and

collective life. This process of “picking up one’s bundle” entails a deeper understanding of the Sacred, not just ritualistic repetitions of static activities or use of objects. It means having a heart connection to greater metaphors in a process of transcending material constraints and finding purpose in life. In this process of restoring and revitalizing identity there is a goal that is acquired through a process of enactment, engaging in ceremony, and using the language, especially during times of prayer. Family/clan gatherings are a large aspect of this process of re-engaging with traditions that are based in clan teachings.

The role of clan membership in contemporary First Nation families is not a visible part of the body of knowledge in contemporary academia, and few studies have touched on this specific area (Aasen, 1992; Toulouse, 2006). Exploring how clan identity relates to the perception of *mishkauziwin* will contribute to a greater understanding of the topic of resilience and of clan revitalization and provide greater knowledge of issues integral to First Nation communities.

The ripple effect of this knowledge enhances the lives of people everywhere who seek greater understanding of individual and community resilience, identity, and trauma recovery.

The topic of language is one that is pertinent in any discussion of this sort given the reality that Anishnaabemowin is no longer the first language of most contemporary Anishnaabe people.

Some communities are stronger in language preservation than others, but in general the efforts to promote language acquisition and use are not entering the mainstream of Anishnaabe life.

Written use of the language is seen in publications, online opportunities to learn and practice the language exist in both Canada and the United States, and language camps are available for anyone to attend at various levels of proficiency. Since language revitalization is not an aspect

of this study it is referred to only as it relates to the family experience, and will be addressed more in the final discussion of the findings.

### 3.4 Summary

Examining the perceptions of *mishkauziwin* within a family working to restore their family/clan identity provides an opportunity for research on the topic in a way which bridges boundaries between peoples, cultures, and academic divisions, and sheds new light on the topic of resilience. Issues of risk and protective factors highlight networks of adaptive capacities, and illumine areas of cultural identity and adaptive networks within traditional frameworks.

Complex issues of identity, culture, and history intersect with the examination of resilience in a First Nations context.

Just as perceptions of participants in studies on resilience are often sidelined, so are the perceptions missing from the current body of knowledge on resilience of clan identity as an aspect of survival, strength, adaptation, and resilience for individuals and communities in Aboriginal contexts. Reviewing the literature on clan knowledge reveals a lack of adequate knowledge for a formulation of a First Nation model of resilience that incorporates the clan structure of Anishnaabe tradition. Additionally, the perceptions of research participants on their own *mishkauziwin* are the core-organizing feature of the research.

This particular study on resilience will contribute significantly to Anishnaabe communities and individuals as well as expand the body of knowledge on the topic of resilience in general. The research looks at systemic issues impacting the lived experiences of the participants, examines

topics of historical trauma as it relates to the family participants, inquiries into cultural identity issues, and works to comprehend the ecological view in Aboriginal contexts.

## Chapter 4

### 4 The journey in learning together

This chapter describes the unique approach of the study in terms of journey, ceremony, and relationship. The general foundation in interdisciplinarity is detailed, the indigenist approach is defined, and the method applied is described. Issues of “otherness” and cultural safety are addressed. The development of the relationship of primary researcher and participants is understood as a Modified Grounded Theory process and participatory process unfolding over time at the direction of the participants.

The traditions providing the foundation for family/clan revitalization and life together are recognized as having a spiritual source, as is the case in all knowledges based in traditional lifeways (Crowshoe, 2005). This spiritual source forms the foundation of a ceremony of research extending beyond collection of information and analysis, with an understanding that relationships continue beyond the structures of the research project. The researcher is not simply an outsider coming into the intimate family circle to study and take knowledge away, never to be seen or heard from again. Shared connections and relationships are negotiated in unbounded fashion as a result of mutual commitments.

The interdisciplinary/qualitative/indigenist approach that characterizes the participatory structure of this research process is a *braiding together* of complementary ways of conducting in-depth research in a respectful manner with family participants. There are aspects of the approaches that cannot be truly “blended” but are integrally intertwined so that each must be



viewed in the light of the other. This braided approach is the foundation of conducting research in an indigenous context without an *othering* process.

The conceptualization underlying this research reflects all that the family participants offered and have accomplished in this work. It is a conceptualization grounded in the family perception of their truth about their way of life. Thomas King (2003) in his book, *The Truth about Stories: A Native Narrative*, writes, “The truth about stories is that’s all we are” (p.153). This chapter will show how the efforts between family and researcher were constructed in approaching the task of telling this particular story of a relationship of study.

#### 4.1 The interdisciplinarity of the study

This discussion of the interdisciplinarity of the study looks at some of the issues related to complexity of knowledge and authority, and the ambiguity that is inherent in interdisciplinary approaches. How interdisciplinarity provides a vehicle for appropriately examining the topic of resilience in a First Nation context is explored in light of the bridgework, which facilitates movement through the dialogic challenge of working within both indigenous knowledge contexts and more formal academic constructs.

A review of the literature on interdisciplinarity contextualizes discussion of an interdisciplinary approach to studying resilience in a First Nation extended family. Monodisciplinary approaches cannot incorporate the multiple and complex aspects of examining family perspectives of their strength and resilience. Interdisciplinarity promotes awareness that life depends upon a complex interconnectedness of things (Morin, 2008; Fogel, King, & Shanker,

2008) where the singularity of a specific topic, issue or problem, nests within a complex system containing the singular aspect (Morin, 2008).

#### 4.1.1 Definition of interdisciplinarity

There is no single definition for interdisciplinary study and function, what it is, what it does, and how. Three key definitional characteristics of interdisciplinary (ID) research are: (a) the primarily qualitative mode, (b) the continuum of synthesis among the disciplines in ID research, and (c) the existence of a desired outcome of ID research (Aboelela et al.2007, p. 329). Drawing on the research review, they provide a proposed definition:

Interdisciplinary research is any study or group of studies undertaken by scholars from two or more distinct scientific disciplines. The research is based upon a conceptual model that links or integrates theoretical frameworks from those disciplines, uses study design and methodology that is not limited to any one field, and requires the use of perspectives and skills of the involved disciplines throughout multiple phases of the research process. (p. 341)

Chettiparamb (2007) notes that interdisciplinarity provides for an epistemological bridging of disciplines and discusses the idea of meta-theories, which have potential to bridge various disciplines epistemologically. She defines interdisciplinarity as linked to the development of science, and interdisciplinary scholars as “bridge scientists,” with systems theory being particularly suited to the tasks and functions of interdisciplinarity (p. 25).

Geertz (1998) presents interdisciplinarity in terms of “refiguration of social thought,” “genre mixing” and as part of “culture shift” (p. 225). He suggests “scientists have become free to shape their work in terms of its necessities rather than received ideas as to what they ought or ought not to be doing” (p. 226). Interdisciplinarity grows out of the knowledge itself that is “calling” to the researcher, waiting to be found. This knowledge is like the tree in the forest waiting for the researcher who is willing and able to move into the forest and look in a new way. Geertz likens this new pursuit of knowledge to a game analogy, and schemas of ritual theory and symbolic action theory play into his perspective (pp. 231–232).

Shailer (2005) delineates definitions of *interdisciplinarity*, *pluridisciplinarity*, *multidisciplinarity*, and *transdisciplinarity* (pp. 1–2), and identifies pressures that are external to the university as crucial in the discussion, much as does Hearn (2003). Shailer (2005) also acknowledges the increased specialization in some disciplines, as well as *subdisciplinary* divisions. Strathern (2004) defines “transdisciplinarity” as “a strong form [of interdisciplinarity]” (p. vii) and addresses public and non-academic aspects in the diversity of interdisciplinarity. She is insistent that social science must “come to grips with the non-linear nature of social phenomena” (p. 1) and discusses the “interculturality” of working across the disciplines.

Moran’s (2002) work on interdisciplinarity addresses the resilience of the disciplines, and explores their breadth as they are “brought together, transformed or transcended in different forms of interdisciplinarity and what new forms of knowledge are created by these interactions” (p. 17). Moran’s definition of interdisciplinarity is broad, flexible, and yet

straightforward. His dialogic viewpoint implies the necessity of conducting “diplomacy” of sorts between two or more disciplines. He believes there is a form of interdisciplinarity in the study of everyday life, creating “connecting glue,” showing how systems of thought are related (p. 68). Studying everyday life in the little things (e.g., in one family) holds potential understandings for the larger things (e.g., one society).

#### 4.1.2 Complexity of interdisciplinarity

To meet the complex needs of a research project *with* an extended Anishnaabe family system, an approach is required that can encompass complex demands. Using an interdisciplinary framework facilitates management of complexity (Klein, 1996; Morin, 2008) and avoids an instrumental character, which “minimizes or negates reflexivity” (Klein, 1996, p. 14). Klein identifies interdisciplinary fields as hybrids, which are “at once their strength and a continuing source of difficulty. . . . Multidimensionality is a vital stimulus, but it is also a constant source of jurisdictional disputes” (p. 58). There exists the pressure, and the need, for knowledge to have form and structure. Since innovation, hybridity, and multidimensionality can paradoxically promote both specialization and multiplicity, the complexity arising from all this can be difficult to contain. It is this need for “synthesis and differentiation [to] exist side by side” (Weingart, 2000, p. 36) which is the challenge of complexity that Morin (2008) addresses, and for which interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary processes are suited.

Complexity exists in all aspects of both monodisciplinary and interdisciplinary research. Krimsky (2000) uses the concept of metatheory in his discussion of transdisciplinarity. Morin’s (2008) work signifies the importance of the concepts of general systems theory in deepening

understandings of interdisciplinarity. He suggests that systems theory allows for the possibility for *metacommunication* (communicating about communication) and *metatheory* (theory about theories) to operate in detailed ways on multiple levels. He discusses how systems theory functions to deepen and broaden the interdisciplinary research in areas of complexity. The conceptual tool for dealing with complexity that he presents is framed as “a paradigm of distinction-conjunction that will allow us to distinguish without disjoining, to associate without identifying or reducing” (p. 6). He writes:

My intention is not to enumerate the “commandments” of complex thought . . . rather, to recognize the enormous deficiencies in our thinking, and to understand that mutilating thought necessarily leads to mutilating actions. My intention is to increase awareness of the contemporary pathology of thought. (p. 6)

His statement resonates with the words of an Elder in the Anishnaabe family participating in this study: “*Science has taken the world down to a separation of the physical from the spiritual, but our traditional understandings of our natural world unify physical and spiritual.*” (HE1) In the past, positivist scientific approaches applied in Aboriginal communities pathologized or discounted traditional practices and paradigms of thought. Interdisciplinary research has a capacity to incorporate complex paradigms of knowledge that lie outside of the usual disciplinary and cultural structures, and create potential for unifying knowledges that are customarily divided.

The dialogue, or negotiation, which must emerge across disciplinary and inter-cultural borders, needs to hold opposing viewpoints as valid simultaneously. As dialogue and interaction seek knowledge in the territories across boundaried locations, disintegration creates further differentiation (Weingart, 2000, p. 40). All of this, then, needs to somehow remain in the same field, bringing new knowledge and ways of knowing into a common territory so that solutions are within reach. There are practical reasons for wanting this process to occur and yet respect boundaries and structures, otherwise, “there could be no such thing as knowledge” (p. 38). The borders of boundaries are often blurred (McLean & Leibing, 2007), and it is in the blurred interstices that conflict arises.

#### 4.1.3 Conflict and critical interdisciplinarity

Conflict between disciplines occurs not only within the university, but also at the interstices between society and the university—the highly sensitive intervening and linking spaces where needs and problems in society contend for the attention of academia. There are multiple influences of internal and external forces on knowledge development via the university. These forces reflect conflicts that highlight hierarchical issues between the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities, which in turn reflect hierarchical conflicts in political, social, and economic spheres.

Whether knowledge is valid or not—to whom it is useful, by and against whom it is used, how and where it shapes praxis and values, how it contributes to forces of control—all these are current struggles just as it has been since the university first formed. Protective disciplinary forces shape the “uninhibited trend towards ever more specialization in science” (Weingart

&Stehr, 2000, p. vii), and have potentially deadening effects on processes and outcomes. Weingart and Stehr (2000) focus on the interdisciplinarity discourse in terms of how knowledge production evolves, and present their collection of essays by various interdisciplinarians as an exploration of the trajectories of “fundamental changes of the social order of knowledge” (p. xvi). The interdisciplinary scholar has much to contribute to the ongoing struggle in this conflict.

Hearn (2003) sees struggle as part of a “movement toward social conformity and political docility [but also as] yet another expression of the contradiction and conflict embedded in the idea of the university” (p. 7). The emergence of “critical interdisciplinarity,” which analyzes existing accepted constructs and paradigms of knowledge, has a particular bearing on areas of study involving indigenous populations and indigenist knowledges. The issue of indigenist knowledges interpenetrating the university reveals tensions between conflicting worldviews.

Baxi (2000) discusses transdisciplinarity in terms of disciplinary boundaries around knowledge, which is applicable here. Outside of these boundaries, he writes:

The rest was non-knowledge, “superstition,” or worse . . . And “reason” was hard and male. The realm of emotions . . . was antithetical to the formation of knowing and the cumulating of knowledges. Neither “savages” nor women were capable of producing “knowledges.” (pp. 81–82)

As Baxi points out, until relatively recently the university did not endorse the knowledges of indigenous peoples or women, and it often functioned in ways which validated forces of

oppression against women and indigenous peoples, the effects of which continue today.

Exclusion of indigenous knowledges and peoples affects indigenous communities around the world in the types of research pursued, and also impacts mainstream social systems by creating inequity and imbalance in overall knowledge. Hearn (2003) writes, “Real learning built out of dialogue is necessarily open-ended, exploratory, and self-referential” (pp.13–14). Real learning benefits the community in the indigenist context, and at the same time benefits the university and all parts of society in viability of knowledge.

The cost to university resiliency through restriction of interdisciplinarity in a global context of increasing social and economic complexity is not something widely addressed, although Newell (1998b) takes into account the potential fruitfulness and cost-effectiveness of interdisciplinarity in education and research. Hearn (2003) views interdisciplinarity as part of the “necessary freedom of knowledge and inquiry” (p. 7), and proposes that interdisciplinarity can assist the creation of linkages between the university and “new forms of community inside and outside the walls . . . imagining new communities to be formed . . . within and against the ‘ruins’ of the university” (p. 12).

Repko (2008) classifies Native Studies<sup>11</sup> as part of the “**new humanities** [author’s emphasis] . . . of interdisciplinary identity fields” (p. 28). Some researchers (Fogel, King, & Shanker, 2008; Mehl-Madrona, 2005) believe that the inclusion of culture to this mix is on the next

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<sup>11</sup> Native Studies, like Women Studies, Canadian Studies, and other Studies, is interdisciplinary in its area of study, and is not considered a separate discipline of its own standing in the eyes of some. In the United States the field of American Indian Studies, likewise, faces the same debate (Champagne, 2007). These issues, written about extensively elsewhere, are noted here to indicate that the researcher is aware of the debate on the disciplinary status of Native Studies.



cutting edge of science. Mehl-Madrona, addressing the epigenetic effects of cultural factors, writes:

I mean to make the radical claim that there is no biology apart from culture. Our efforts to carve the world into separate academic disciplines have been futile and need to be reversed. I believe more sensitive future research will begin to reveal how cultural beliefs shape physiological responses and modulate the expression of genes, even turning some on and off. I believe we will come to see that genes are exquisitely responsive to what we do and how we live in community with others. I predict that this discovery of a new field of cultural genetics will be a hallmark of the twenty-first century into which we have now embarked. (pp. 221–222)

Additional concerns about conflicting social, political, and cultural issues spread across the interdisciplinarity discourse among theorists, practitioners and educators (Baxi, 2000; Klein, 1990, 1996, 1998, 2005; Krimsky, 2000; Moran, 2002; Morin, 2008; Salter & Hearn, 1996; Weingart & Stehr, 2000). As an interdisciplinary theorist, Klein (1990) asserts that interdisciplinarity is “a process for achieving an integrative synthesis” (p. 188). Weingart (2000) elaborates on a “paradoxical discourse,” and others focus on the transformative potential of interdisciplinarity for praxis in various realms, calling the process “transdisciplinarity.”

#### 4.1.4 Authority, ambiguity and parallels

Questions of authority come into play when we discuss boundaries, knowledge generation, and negotiation of differences. Geertz (1998) notes, “the lines grouping scholars together into intellectual communities, or . . . sorting them out into different ones, are these days running at some highly eccentric angles” (p. 228). These “blurred genres” live in the interstitial spaces between disciplines and cultures, calling for examination of issues from a truly interdisciplinary stance, taking into account the intricate matrices within which most problems exist. Those who enter into cross-cultural (interstitial) zones, both within the university and society, are interdisciplinary adventurers who must possess skills of flexibility, and have a high tolerance for ambiguity, tension, paradoxical situations and power struggles. The interstitial zone can be likened to an onion, where the membrane transporting nourishment between the layers is the first place where breakdown in the “system” of the onion will be evident. The interstitial zone of relationships is the first place to look in assessing the health or resilience of the system.

The interdisciplinary scholar must be able to hold together simultaneous ambivalences and ambiguities arising from juxtaposing the realities of specialization and blending that come from interdisciplinarity (Weingart, 2000). Ambiguity may be a critical component of strength in the system of knowledge creation as a whole, since without the ability to tolerate ambiguity the system becomes brittle and vulnerable to disintegration. Contemporary Aboriginal peoples are no strangers to grappling with ambiguity as they strive to maintain resilient identities in a

complex modern world. The integrative potential of interdisciplinarity in the research process facilitates the management of ambiguities.

Society's established professions rely on robust disciplines, and have significant investment in maintaining privileging structures, as they currently exist, both for ethical and financial reasons. Interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research and practice is increasingly gaining in importance, particularly in inter-professional settings, yet this does not threaten the stability of the disciplines. Research institutions often rely on researchers who possess interdisciplinary skills, the ability to negotiate ambiguities of inter-cultural work, and the capacity to manage complexity in research and relationships. It is in the interests of both society and the academy to invest in systems approaches that facilitate these relationships.

#### 4.1.5 A systems perspective

Studying an Anishnaabe family system whose members have unique perspectives on their strength, resilience, and their own clan identity, provides an opportunity to bring multiple disciplinary perspectives to an issue with significant contemporary meaningfulness. The context of political, historical and social realities for First Nations peoples calls for perspectives from the disciplines of anthropology, political science, social work, sociology, psychology, Native Studies, and others. The situation is ripe with potential for hyper-complexity, yet requires a manageable, straightforward approach.

Critically analyzing this situation from a systems perspective facilitates reduction of cognitive discord accompanying hyper-complex matters. The dynamic systems approach has been used

in studies of families since the work of Murray Bowen at the National Institutes of Health in the United States in the early 1960s (Friedman, 1985, p. 105) and is widely used today in studies of child and human development (Fogel, King & Shanker, 2008). Research on complex systems requires an approach that can encompass multiple relationships embedded within and among multiple parts of a system and its environs. The systems approach relies on pattern identification and emphasizes *relational* causality containing “a description of the complex relationships between parts of a whole system, and how that system functions in real situations” (Fogel, Greenspan, King et al., 2008, p. 239). Using a dynamic systems perspective is helpful in an investigation with a hyper-complex nature.

The resurgence of Native traditional practices (e.g., the revitalization of family clan systems) where cultural life is reorganizing itself is an example of the permanent regeneration Morin (2008) describes. The distinct life of a people and of natural processes regenerates the people through their confrontation of their losses, their examination of what has disintegrated and fractured, and their move into re-balance and re-growth. Morin believes that “Lived solidarity is the only thing that allows an increase in complexity” (p. 66). The complexity in the lived solidarity of a family system flourishes throughout the generations, as well as in the context of “relationships of study” (research), giving rise to real learning about emergent expressions of resilience.

## 4.2 Interdisciplinarity and the Indigenist Approach

This study looks specifically at the perceptions of *mishkauziwin* in an Anishnaabe extended family of Northwestern Ontario, examining family members’ understandings of their clan

identity and its influence on their concept of *mishkauziwin*. Anishnaabemowin has no word that directly translates as the English word resilience, but in terms of strength, the word *mishkauziwin* comes closest to the meaning of that which is resilient—continues, remains strong, perseveres, rebounds and survives.

Klein (2005) is one interdisciplinary scholar who speaks to the unique position of Native American people, writing, “Because they have ongoing treaty relationships with the federal government, they must understand and negotiate forms of tribal governance that hybridize local knowledge with external American constitutional models” (p. 197). While she speaks from the viewpoint of a scholar in the American academy, she references situations similar to those of the First Peoples of Canada, who have had to struggle for self-determination within dominant structures that have consistently shaped their societies toward assimilation, and the promoted annihilation of traditional social, cultural and governing structures such as traditional clan systems.

Klein understands how skilled native peoples must be in these negotiations for self-determination, which highlights an aspect of interdisciplinarity itself—bridgework. Aboriginal communities have their own skilled “interdisciplinary” who have been, and continue to be, on a hard uphill climb to heal the ravages of colonization on the lives of their people, and to negotiate balanced relationships with the colonizing governments. Aboriginal peoples have developed their own approaches for initiating and participating in research efforts, and have worked toward developing models of resilience specific to First Nations realities, which are often divergent from the aims and priorities of the encompassing Canadian social system.

Insights emerging from the bridgework of interdisciplinary studies in Aboriginal contexts present a potential source of support for ongoing efforts of healing, since learning and healing often go hand-in-hand with research in indigenist contexts and in First Nations settings (Nabigon, Hagey, Webster, & MacKay, 1999).

An interdisciplinary approach allows a wide-angle lens to focus on the various perspectives of family members. The family participation has grown out of their willingness to be in a relationship, as co-researchers, with the primary researcher. A clear mutual understanding exists regarding my position on the “border” since I am not born to the Anishnaabe people, yet personal affiliations facilitate connections to the family not easily accessible to most other researchers. As someone in a “relationship of study” alongside the participants working within a context of implicit and explicit trust, commitment, and friendship, it is possible for me to construct egalitarian ways of relating. The *topic* is the *subject* with observations made from multiple locations, none of which limits what comes into view.

Morin’s (2008) work provides a conceptualization framework that is useful in constructing a study with methods that can hold the complexity of multiple worldviews together in a dialogic fashion. The critical issue of relationships of all the aspects of complexity is precisely what he addresses when he discusses open and closed systems and their consequences. He writes:

Reality is therefore as much in the connection (relationship) as in the distinction between the open system and its environment [author’s emphasis]. This connection is crucial epistemologically, methodologically, theoretically, and empirically. Logically,

the system cannot be understood except by including the environment. The environment is at the same time intimate and foreign: it is a part of the system while remaining exterior to it. (p. 11)

He described living organisms (e.g., open systems such as a family) as self-organizing and being a “living order [that] is not simple. It does not follow the logic that we apply to mechanical things, but postulates a logic of complexity” (p. 18). He moves to consideration of a “human problem—*hyper-complexity*” [author’s emphasis] (p. 21), calling for a broader vision of science that “question[s] the old paradigm of disjunction/reduction/simplification” (p. 29), bringing conflicting aspects or parts into dialogue. The following comment expresses his perspective:

I strongly believe that the less a thought is mutilating, the less it will mutilate human beings [*sic*]. We must remember the ravages that simplifying visions have caused, not only in the intellectual world, but also in life. Much of the suffering of millions of beings results from the effects of fragmented and one-dimensional thought. (p. 57)

The interdisciplinary framework of this research allowed for an organic unfolding of the work together in an open manner, which respected differences without augmenting disjunction and conflict.

### 4.3 Indigenist approaches, indigenous knowledge paradigms, and indigenous research

No sanctioned standardization of indigenous research currently exists to instruct a clear, simple approach. This is an era of exciting activity in indigenous research, with a wealth of resources emerging from Aboriginal researchers and non-Aboriginal allies (Chamberlin, 2004; Davis, L., 2010; Epp, 2008; Kuokkanen, 2007; Ross, 2006; Warry, 2007). Aboriginal communities over the past several decades have been directing their own research, developing their own research guidelines, and determining how their research should be used (Chilisa, 2012; Research Review Working Committee, 2003; Webster & Nabigon, 1993; Wilson, S., 2008).

The challenges that face Aboriginal researchers are daunting in the face of resistance from the dominant ways of being in the larger society as well as the academy (Duran E., 2006; Hart & Whatman, 1998; Kovach, 2009; Moeke-Pickering et al., 2006; Oakes, Riewe, Wilde, Edmunds, & Dubois, 2003; Smith, 1999). Much work is proceeding around the globe on bringing into the academy a reasoned approach whereby “colonizing epistemologies and methodologies” (Chilisa, 2012, p. xv) and the diversity expressed in indigenous ways of knowing can be brought together in an interconnected paradigm (Chilisa, 2012; Dei, Hall, & Rosenberg, 2000; Gray, Coates, & Yellow Bird, 2008; Smith, 1999; Wilson, S., 2008). Transformation is occurring in various academic and professional settings (Dei, Hall & Rosenberg, 2000; Duran, E., 2006; Duran, E. & Duran, B. 1995; Minnich, 2005) and strength is growing in developing frameworks for decolonizing research and efforts to indigenize the academy (Bartlett, Iwasaki, Gottlieb, Hall, & Mannell, 2007; Kuokkanen, 2007; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004).



Signs of emerging “epistemological hybridity” (Duran, Firehammer & Gonzalez, 2008, p. 291) remain in tension with the concerns in Aboriginal communities regarding assimilationist aspects of a Western model of research, education, and health and social services. Gone (2009b) describes the situation as “a longstanding conundrum for many Native people regarding the utility and value of a Western education: under what conditions do education’s vocational prospects compensate for its assimilationist transformations?” (p.422). Particular concern regarding these issues comes up in relation to training of mental health professionals who are Aboriginal and intending to serve Aboriginal communities (Gone, 2004).

This research structured the focus of family and researcher on the benefits to the family arising from a participatory research project. The family extended the circle of their research participation as a support *to* and *with* the researcher. The research was approached and structured as primarily serving the family goal of furthering the revitalization of their family/clan structure by learning more about their *mishkauziwin*, thus avoiding inherent tensions and conflict between community-based research and academic interests.

The indigenist approach, the central organizing aspect of the methodology, has a dialectical nature braiding together what could be seen as incompatible methods. This approach recognizes indigenous oral history, and utilizes indigenous values (Moeke-Pickering et al., 2006), which means that matters under examination are not subjected to divisive categories, but topics and outcomes are sought that will be holistic and representative of “true” knowledge rooted in the community. Empirical scientific approaches often cannot, by nature of research designs and the purposes they serve, encompass the holistic view in ways that do not violate

indigenous knowledges or community values (Duran, E., personal communication, 2011). Indigenist research is often of a hybrid nature, is collaborative (Gibbs, 2001; Sanders & Hamilton, 1998), and incorporates customs and traditions of indigenous participants (Hart & Whatman, 1998).

In using an indigenist approach as the guiding paradigm of the research, the hybridity of Aboriginal life in the modern world is recognized as requiring a negotiation of two worlds or more. The family is understood as a *living system* with a history, a future, and a dynamic present with great complexity. To do this work together requires a living relationship of study within which the subject of the research is a *topic*, or phenomenon, not a person or group. The goal of the research is to create space for an iterative process of knowledge study.

Aboriginal knowledge constructs have little visibility in the academy, yet there has been, and continues to be, work by Aboriginal scholars which expand the transformation occurring in the academy. Aboriginal knowledge constructs are moving out of subjugated positions into viable positions that reduce the marginalization of Aboriginal knowledges and languages. Battiste (1998) writes:

Fundamental to Aboriginal knowledge is the awareness that beyond the immediate sensible world of perception, memory, imagination, and feelings lies another world from which knowledge, power, or medicine is derived from which the Aboriginal peoples will survive and flourish. The complementary modes of knowing in the tribal

world form the essence of tribal epistemology and have been continually transmitted through the oral tradition. (p.18)

This is the foundation of the relationship of study and the ceremony of research by which the work is approached together (Salois, Holkup, Tripp-Reimer, & Weinert, 2006; Wilson, S., 2008). Wilson speaks of his belief that “Indigenous people share a unique way of thinking because of the prevalence of a common Indigenous epistemology” (p.33), and goes on to develop an “Indigenous research paradigm.” His concept of the spiritual aspects of research are seldom recognized in the academy, yet it can be viewed as a gift brought to the academy, shedding greater light on a ceremony of learning together which is sacred. The process of conducting research with a sacred, indigenist approach is not, nor should it be, confined to use only by Indigenous researchers, but it is one that can only be effectively used by researchers who have the ability to see and understand spiritual aspects of research.

An indigenist approach provides a way to handle power asymmetry between the researcher and the participants because it is “fluid, non-linear, and relational” (Kovach, 2005, p. 27). The work of family and researcher together has its own synergy moving the project forward in a heuristic fashion. It is compatible with the interdisciplinarity of the study, which allows different methods of research and kinds of knowledge to stand together (Salter & Hearn, 1996).

It is not the purpose of this study to resolve any of the current debates on indigenous knowledges or indigenist approaches to research; however, it is important to acknowledge the debate as to whether or not non-indigenous researchers can do “indigenous research” without

violating fundamental concepts of ethical and moral positioning in relationship to native communities. The deeper problems of Eurocentric essentialism and appropriation of indigenous knowledge in historical and contemporary contexts underlie the debate.

Fundamentally, the concepts of both indigenous and indigenist research embody relational and participatory approaches to research, referred to as “the relationship of study” (Wenger-Nabigon, 2012).

Most indigenous knowledges and paradigms of education are rooted in oral transmission of knowledge, oral histories, traditional story-telling, songs, dances, narratives and pictorial representations, e.g. wampum, pictographs, and bark and beading records (Calliou, 2004; Lavallée, 2009; Warren, 1885/1984). Written recordings and transmissions in the northern Western hemisphere have not predominated in transmission of indigenous knowledges until the more recent past, and with the loss of oral histories and transmission methods subsequent to European contact and colonization, much knowledge has been lost along with the natural world that gave rise to those knowledges. Oral history can be defined in many ways, and continues to be an essential aspect of postmodern knowledge construction (Janesick, 2010, p. 14). This research recognizes and utilizes the role of oral history, and oral transmission of knowledge in the family restoration process.

The work of reclaiming, or restoring, indigenous knowledge paradigms has been an effort for several decades by indigenous scholars and activists (Wilson, A. C., 2004), often facing direct opposition from the academy (Smith, 1999). Non-indigenous scholars seeking to function as allies walk a precarious line in this territory seeking avenues of intersecting interests. The gift

of “indigenous epistemes” makes possible a process of restoration. “[The] logic of the gift constitutes a necessary paradigm shift that promises to steer the university toward its future fully open to the ‘other’” (Kuokkanen, 2007, p.22). The gift of this family research is not only one the family gives to itself, and to the researcher, it is one that encompasses a gift to the larger body of knowledge, to the restoration of indigenous knowledges, and to the responsible “reshaping” of the university (pp. 24–26).

European-dominated history essentializes knowledge in a way that “disappears” indigenous knowledge and its oral transmission, or freezes these knowledges spatially and temporally, thus reducing the contemporary role fulfillment of a formerly dominant population of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Against this backdrop, oral history is gaining increased favor politically and academically in many fields, and its utility is increasingly recognized in the discipline of History (Janesick, 2010). This research project is rooted in the oral history traditions of Anishnaabe peoples, and draws upon contemporary applications of oral history approaches in qualitative research. A relational and collaborative (Gibbs, 2001; Sanders & Hamilton, 1998; Stebbins, 2001; Strauss, 1987) foundation is incorporated into every aspect of the work.

An indigenist approach is possible in this research as it is integrally intertwined with the spiritual, cultural, and familial values and norms of the family participants. The ethos of decolonizing processes, respect for Aboriginal peoples and knowledges, traditional values, methods of transmission, and recognition of transformative healing aspects are all encompassed by the indigenist approach, facilitating a viable and meaningful relationship of study.

#### 4.4 The ceremony of research

This work flows from a personal search to know more about human resilience, and a desire for the project to create space for wisdom regarding human resilience to emerge in new ways from the perspectives of the participants. Strong efforts have been made to avoid creating divisive lines separating “knower” and “inquirer” from each other, or from the topic, while seeking relationships of study on multiple levels—social, emotional, mental and spiritual—representative of the four directions of the Medicine Wheel. Mutual efforts bracketed by traditionally based interactions through ceremonies and rituals facilitated working together “in a good way” with the participating Anishnaabe family members.

This ceremony of research, along with the underlying interdisciplinary framework, situated the research in *indigenist methodology* along with qualitative methodological approaches. Wilson (2008) has spoken of methodology as being the “means to an end” and states, “as long as the methods fit the ontology, epistemology and axiology of the Indigenous paradigm, they can be borrowed from other suitable research paradigms” (p.39). The tools used, rooted in indigenous traditions (e.g., Talking Circles, smudge, etc.) actualize the ceremony of research, and become the techniques of research that follow “the Indigenous axiology of relational accountability” (p.39). Applying the tools of Grounded Theory (GT), narrative analysis, and phenomenology worked to support the participatory process of the family project.

The ceremony of research in indigenist contexts is often, or even primarily, for the purpose of healing. Browne, Smye, and Varcoe (2005) argue that “continuities from the past shape the present context of health and health care” (p.17). In their research on the relevance of post-

colonial theory to health care in Aboriginal communities, they highlight the goal of rebalancing inequities in research as a path to healing in a holistic way considering the social setting of healing (p.25). Healing is a natural aspect of research for Aboriginal peoples, and becomes an aspect of addressing the systemic and intentional damage of colonization on indigenous cultures worldwide (Memmi, 1965). Moral issues related to healing are raised whenever research addresses issues of health and well-being, mental health, resilience, and self-determination in indigenous settings (Smye & Browne, 2002).

When elders and leaders are able to meaningfully integrate cultural aspects of traditional ways into the research process through indigenous methodologies and intentional work together (Lavallée, 2009), the work will flourish. “The Trickster is always at work in the dialogue, and the humor arising from the dynamics between the Trickster and the speaker is a source of healing” (Nabigon, et al, 1999, p. 114). This statement reflects the understanding that research in indigenous contexts requires balance, and each “speaker” or research participant is cognizant that matters are not “either/or” but that dynamic forces of both/and are in constant flux.

#### 4.4.1 Cultural safety issues

There are three basic levels of ethics<sup>12</sup> to consider when conducting research in indigenous contexts: (a) within the circle—the “relationship of study”—social, emotional, mental, and spiritual; (b) accountability to the participants and larger community of indigenous peoples—community protocols and permissions; and (c) academic responsibilities—transparency,

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<sup>12</sup>The “rules of conduct that express and reinforce important social and cultural values” (Castellano, 2004, p. 99).

accuracy, verifiability of “data” and “data collection” process (“staying close to the data”), and sharing/reporting the results. These ethics are considered to be timeless, mutual, and guided by a spiritual ethos in indigenist research. Respectful treatment of knowledge arising from indigenous contexts must be the foundation and framework for any research work within those contexts, and is routinely noted in discussion of ethics in indigenous contexts (Castellano, 2004; Gibbs, 2001; Innes, 2004; Joint Management Committee, AHWS, 2001; Meadows, Legendyk, Thurston, & Eisener, 2003; Sanders & Hamilton, 1998). The circle of relationships is neither individualistic nor static, but is reflexive, holistic, organic, and fluid. Within that circle, additional layers of accountability and relationship are necessary for the non-indigenous person working in indigenous contexts.

A foundational principle is willingness to engage in personal work, as Lampert (2003) has said, “the work of questioning my own identity” (p.18). She notes that rarely does the academy ask that the non-indigenous researcher working in indigenous contexts move from the “inauthentic” position of “objectivity” (p.20) to “look inwards rather than outwards” (p.18). Her statement, “The world I need to change is embodied in me” (p.20), is representative of a lifelong process that is quite personal for me. I am more than a stereotypical “white” academic working cross-culturally, and I carry my own challenges of living on the margins in a dominant society that renders me and my spiritual and cultural background invisible, albeit in a way very different from the experiences of the First Nation family participants. Those who are members of “invisible minorities” have their own unique difficulties traversing the slippery territory of dealing with a dominant culture, particularly when that world can claim them as their own



based on racial stereotypes. Still, the work of “decolonizing” my identity and engaging in culturally safe practices as I position myself in the research is essential work, demanding that issues of privilege be examined responsibly and with accountability to the community.

Non-indigenous researchers working in indigenous contexts need to engage in a solid critical analysis of the issues surrounding colonization, race and racism, the issue of genocide, and in the personal work of decolonizing themselves. It is necessary to understand the systemic issues via an historical consciousness, knowing that the complex phenomena surrounding these issues have been constructed, not by individual or group characteristics, but by the circumstances of a dominating power structure which established hierarchies promoting imperial and colonial aims, supported by the religious aims of racialization (Rigney, 1999, pp. 111–112). Effective researchers will be able to negotiate the particulars of dealing with dynamics surrounding these issues, and apply practices and consciousness of decolonization in research, if they are cognizant of the larger historical context (Castellano, 2000; Moeke-Pickering, 2012; Regan, 2010; Wesley-Esquimaux, 2004), and able to avoid being drawn into debates based on less comprehensive understandings of the complexity of the topics.

The researcher working in these contexts needs to comprehend these matters, and should be able to work fluently within the framework of understanding that participants bring to the circle of work together. Both researcher and the community of participants will be handicapped in their efforts together when researchers lack this facility, whether they are of indigenous or non-indigenous background. It is false to assume that based solely on a researcher’s identity, any particular facility or lack of facility with these matters will exist. Months or years of

acquisition are usually required to establish such facility and build trust with participants, and there is little available in the academy to assist one in preparation for this work. It is founded on integrity of relationship, on people coming to know each other in a trusting fashion, and on a willingness to enter into an “imperfect union” which moves towards a mutual goal. There may be difficult challenges at times requiring bidirectional forgiveness on various levels, but the rewards in outcome are a research product that has not only substance, but spirit, which is representative of a particular form of truth—not “The Truth,” but “*a truth*,”—which is mutually recognized.

There are significant risks in doing this research, primarily for indigenous peoples whose heritage of knowledge has so often in the past been discounted and/or appropriated, a process that continues to be a threat in contemporary times (Battiste & Henderson, 2005; Castellano, 2004). Non-indigenous researchers who work to build bridges and contribute to the capacity of indigenous communities (Lampert, 2003; Zapf, 1999) have their work cut out for them. Inter-professional settings, such as health care facilities, are often locations for significant work of this nature (Maar & Shawande, 2010). The efforts can sometimes be suspect from all directions, and can be viewed as politically incorrect or threatening both by those from within and outside the indigenous community, or the academy.

Interdisciplinary scholars and allies of indigenous peoples need to maintain a stance of respect, and that of the non-expert, in any case. They must first listen with the heart, and second, accept that the process is a lifelong commitment that is both about who they are as persons and also about shifting borders and boundaries of time, culture, and political realities. Researchers and

participants will need to accept that mistakes will probably happen, *and* they can trust the process and embrace the journey together. It is a necessary and valuable endeavor to work toward the goals of reconciliation in all areas of society, along with the effort to become an “anti-oppressive researcher” (Potts & Brown, 2005).

#### 4.4.2 Issues of “otherness”

When academics speak of “The Other” there is implied a whole set of understandings about relationships between peoples of differing backgrounds that may not be completely understood in its complexity. Yet, all people who have found themselves in situations where they have experienced the effects of an *othering* process, frequently to their detriment, will be sensitive to the nature of that othering whether or not they use the same language or words to express the experience. In research with Aboriginal peoples this issue of *otherness* is out front and in the open as far as the participants are concerned. Piquemal (2003) expresses a frequently experienced reality: “Most researchers enter the field knowing that the other exists; indeed, that is why they are there in the first place! However, researchers soon discover that there is considerable mistrust of academics and their intentions” (p. 119–200).

When researchers ignore or fail to acknowledge this reality, they miss an important opportunity to strengthen working relationships of trust and mutuality. Early in the work when conducting the pilot project to explore working together, I attended the 2008 family reunion to negotiate the terms of our working together, and was assisted by an elder in the family (since deceased). He made a seemingly casual remark as we strolled across a powwow ground toward the meeting place, saying with a smile and a slight laugh, “*You know a lot of us Native people*

*don't like research done on us.*" I acknowledged this was true and that I knew researchers had often treated the knowledge of Native people unfairly. I asked if it was something we should talk about more. In response, he patted me on the shoulder and said, "*No, I just wanted to say that.*" I nodded and we did not speak more about it, but much had been said silently in the manner by which we acknowledged what is an "elephant in the room" for non-indigenous researchers. By a calm willingness to remain silently accepting, I affirmed his cultural values and communication styles in dealing with a touchy topic (Brant, 1993).

Addressing the issue of "otherness" in discussion of cultural safety has been done well by many academics around the world, and there is a rich body of literature applicable to this broad topic. Cultural safety when working in multi-cultural situations requires that:

[One should] be self-aware in regard to her or his own identities and cultural norms, sensitive to the realities of human difference, and possessed of an epistemology of difference that allows for creative responses to the way in which the strengths and resiliencies inherent in identities inform, transform, and are also distorted by distress and dysfunction. (Brown, L., 2008, as quoted in Brown, L., 2009, pp.341–342)

Since self-awareness and sensitivity are not generally acquired via the reading of books and attendance at lectures, researchers must understand that their work in Aboriginal communities or contexts has to be predicated by a personal process of coming to terms with the issue of otherness. Something is required of a deeper reflective nature encompassing psychological,

social, and spiritual maturation requiring sensitivity to distinctiveness. This becomes an avenue to connectedness.

For the researcher to work authentically, personal work must not come at the expense of, in terms of time and resources, the people with whom they are working. Homework needs to be done prior to beginning the research work. Too often researchers count on learning as they go, which is part of the process, to be sure, but if they have not done the requisite homework they will soon be viewed as someone with pretenses, doing the research primarily for their own benefit and not to genuinely give back to the community. Research that does not give back is suspect and hardly relevant to community needs. Our research had to be solidly situated with integral meaning to the family itself in order for there to be relevance to our work together. Kahakalau (2004) emphasized this aspect when she wrote that the work “must be first and foremost accountable to our indigenous community” (p.19). Appropriation of indigenous knowledges continues today, and is a backdrop to mistrust, which must be overcome.

Another concern when discussing the issues of otherness is that individuals and/or groups of people who are marginalized in and by the larger society can be harmed through perceptions that relegate them into positions of victims. Stairs (2004) writes:

We may either perceive indigenous peoples as desperately harmed victims of our oppression or as resilient heroes in resisting, surviving, and taking action in face of such histories of cultural oppression. At either extreme, we perpetuate a colonizing discourse of the Other, re-inscribing inequities by making others the Other in a dehumanizing—consciously or not—generic sense. (p.112)

One of the goals of this study is to avoid that trap by focusing on participants' own perceptions of their *mishkauziwin* without framing their strengths in ways that are tied to specific dysfunctions. In other words, to remain focused on process rather than content, and to separate person from problem, correctly problematizing troublesome issues with accurate attribution to their social and historical links rather than personal deficits. The strength of the members of the family/clan is not something heroic—it simply *is*, and the family would like to know more about it. They are more interested in their own agency and origins, than in “well-intended but paradoxically demeaning and damaging research stances” (Stairs, p.113).

#### 4.5 The research design

From the inception of the project, the design evolved in an organic fashion directed by the family. This research model is characterized as “a relationship of study” with an indigenist paradigm—the study grows and evolves from primary participatory relationships, is descriptive in nature, and follows indigenist values. Organic processes can be less than clear-cut and straightforward but this is the nature of processes such as those adapted from Grounded Theory. Modifying and blending principles from Grounded Theory, narrative analysis, and phenomenology was part of the approach, along with use of traditional Aboriginal research (or learning) methods of Talking Circles and informal individual interviews. Throughout the project, an iterative process occurred through consultation, reflection, feedback and review.

##### 4.5.1 The family-directed journey

The circle of relationships for this research is situated with an extended Anishnaabe family with generational roots beginning in northwestern Ontario. Initial consultations with the family

floated the idea that meaningful research could be done together. From the outset, respected elders of the family were part of the explorations both informally and formally, and the questions emerged from those relationships. Many in the family were enthusiastic about being part of a research project as an avenue to further the work they had been doing in revitalizing their family/clan identity, and the goal of passing knowledge to future generations.

When the family reunions began, there was little formal structure to the gatherings. The sharing of stories was a central organizing facet, and gradually a more formal negotiation of the time and place for gatherings developed. As the years have passed, more extended family members have been added to the list of people who are notified of the reunions, and representation of families has expanded. Activities created in the course of planning the reunions sometimes segue into the powwows held at various First Nations from which the majority of family members originate, although the reunions are not always held on a First Nation. Expenses are kept very low to make it possible for everyone to participate. The fluidity of this circular process of “story-ing,” negotiating, restoring, representing, and creating is constantly circling and in flux (Wenger-Nabigon, 2012).

The process of engaging in the research project is indicative of the family system in the early beginnings of moving toward a more formalized structure of organization, reminiscent of the earlier cultural structures of the Anishnaabe clan system. How much similarity will follow is dependent on future generations as the revitalization continues to unfold in complexity, or devolve into a more porous or less structured format.

#### 4.5.2 Family/clan-centered Modified Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory (GT) investigations, in which the research proceeds from inception by each step being informed by what has been learned and theorized from the preceding steps (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 2001), hold the greatest potential for culturally safe work with indigenous peoples, as it allows for the iterative process to unfold in a manner supporting the needs of the research participants. The extended family participating in this study was actively engaged from the outset in shaping how the research was structured and conducted. Their ownership in the process was clear, the values of contrasting rather than comparing (Glaser, 2001, p. 29) was embedded throughout, and the participants actively grappled with their conceptualizations of their own strength and resilience—their *mishkauziwin*. The modifications of the Grounded Theory approach allowed for greater flexibility to bring forward the voices of the participants and engage them in processes that were inherently culturally familiar. There is much in the traditional Anishnaabe “ways of knowing” and “ways of learning” which is compatible with structures of Grounded Theory studies.

The participatory nature of the family directed work is similar to other participatory models. Participatory Research (PR) is characterized by commitment to collaboration, reciprocity, negotiation and innovation (Kidd & Kral, 2005). It is “never fixed but rather a partial and ongoing process requiring a special kind of reflexivity and attentiveness” (p. 493). The use of snowball sampling, for example, is evidence of the cascade of relationships emerging from intuition, instinct, opportunity and experience in a PR approach. PR methodology situates the research in relational constructs where “data collection and analysis process reflect the



experience and understanding[of participants]” (Getty, 2010, p. 8).<sup>13</sup> Finding the middle ground in negotiating mutual interests can be facilitated by a PR approach when working in indigenous contexts (Mohammed, Walters, LaMarr, Evans-Campbell & Fryberg, 2011).

Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) approaches can sometimes present seemingly impossible difficulties for Research Ethics Boards (REB) because of the challenges in describing the research process. Guta, Nixon, Gahagan, and Fielden (2012) studied how Canadian REBs are meeting this challenge and found a strong commitment and sophisticated understanding of the issues in developing ethical research standards that are flexible for evolving designs. Increasingly, the value of “respecting participants’ representations” (Damianakis & Woodford, 2012, p. 711) is essential for Community Based Participatory Research. The preparation that is required for ethical work in PR models, particularly with small or closely connected communities, is noted by Caine, Davison, and Stewart (2009). Communities formed by a discrete sample of populations, such as people living with mental illnesses, also seem better served by the knowledge emerging from respectful and ethical use of PR approaches (Stacciarini, Shattell, Coady, & Wiens, 2011), as well as Grounded Theory approaches.

Participatory Action Research is another model of PR that is often applied in indigenous contexts where a need exists to study and solve problems such as health issues (Castleden, Morgan, & Lamb, 2012; Etowa, Matthews, Vukic, & Jesty, 2011). In these types of settings,

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<sup>13</sup> Getty’s work is a good example of how PR can be engaged in well by non-indigenous researchers working collaboratively within indigenous contexts

PR principles are “generally understood as a process by which decision-making power and ownership are shared between the researcher and the community involved” (Castleden et al., 2012, p.160).

This research does not deal with identifying a specific problem to find a solution, yet it has many of the characteristics of a CBPR study. Just as Koster, Baccar, and Lemelin (2012) demonstrated in their work using a critical reflection on CBPR research in indigenous communities, we have engaged in research *with* and *for* the participants in a manner whereby the work is embedded within the location and context rather than being subjected to the insertion of an outside model and forcing a “good fit.” This type of collaborative work with indigenous communities can be especially useful when processes, not people, are examined when addressing problematic issues (Evans, Hole, Berg, Hutchinson, & Sookraj, 2009).

The indigenist approach to the work together made it possible for characteristics of identity and resilience, as experienced by family participants, to emerge. The relationship of study made it possible to deal with bordered identity issues and contributed to a process that is one by which “we come to recognize who we are but also. . . a process by which others recognize us for who we say we are” (Montoya, 1998, p. 132). Montoya writes, “Whether the stories are subversive may ultimately be a question that is positioned and relational and, like our identities, bordered” (p. 152). Perceptions that emerge from the borders via indigenist research have potential to bring forward knowledge not easily comprehended from within academic contexts.

### 4.5.3 The pilot project: beginning the journey

A pilot project was conducted August 1–4, 2008 with a Family Talking Circle that took place at a family reunion where I was invited to present the research idea and tell the story of how the idea came to me. The pilot project was used to determine the level of family interest in the research and obtain appropriate consultation and permission for the study following Canadian Institutes of Health Research Guidelines for Ethical Research with Aboriginal Peoples (2010; 2014).<sup>14</sup> Conducting a pilot project was important not only for the family, but also in preparing me for the work ahead and the challenges I would face in developing relationships.

My experience highlights some of the difficulties in doing indigenist research. Researchers are often reluctant to include Aboriginal peoples in the parameters of their participant selections, some because of ethical concerns, but others simply because there is not the political will to build appropriate relationships. When researchers are reluctant to do the work required to ensure ethical approaches for indigenous contexts, there can be devastating effects on the widely varied Aboriginal populations in Canada. A report in the Canadian Medical Association Journal highlights concerns regarding exclusion of Aboriginal peoples in health research (Webster, 2012) and notes the growing concern about representation of Aboriginal peoples in research with significant impact on policies pertaining to Aboriginal peoples lives. The constricted representation of Aboriginal peoples in research projects, with various layers of

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<sup>14</sup>The older version (2007) was the one originally referred to for the pilot project. It is archived by Canadian Institutes of Health Research at <http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/29134.html>

exclusion subtly creeping into research applied in Aboriginal contexts, contributes to a negative impact on policies affecting Aboriginal communities across Canada (Smylie, 2005).

“Collaborative efforts with non-Aboriginal researchers are often part of the problem for Aboriginal peoples because the ethics and protocols of western communities are not the same as those of Aboriginal communities.” (O’Riley, 2004, p. 8) For the family participants the necessary layers of invitation, review, signed permissions, and so forth, were not important protocols. What was important was the protocol of offering tobacco and consulting the family in the right way and being in the right relationship with the family. The techniques of interviewing and doing interviews included fine points of unspoken protocols of respect that could only be grounded in relationship, not formal academic training on interviewing skills (Kvale, 2007). For the larger academic community, written requirements extended beyond the foundational family agreements, reflecting the dominant paradigm manifested through Western culture within which the academy is rooted. This is risky territory, presenting very real challenges to both researcher and participants, particularly when negotiating consent (Davis, L., 2004; Davison, Brown, & Moffitt, 2006; Ellis & Earley, 2006). The real difficulties begin when issues of analysis and sharing of research “findings” are confronted, as that is the point where issues of appropriation and ownership of knowledge come to the forefront.

These concerns are noted as an alert to other researchers to be prepared to expend the necessary effort and time when designing and proceeding with research in Aboriginal contexts. There is little support given students working through these challenges, and students are on their own for the most part to sort through the layers of the required processes and the

necessary relationships. I was able to obtain support in my work through the Student Aboriginal Graduate Education group, Laurentian University branch, a group that specifically assists primarily Aboriginal students, but also non-Aboriginal students working in Aboriginal contexts. The assistance of the Student Aboriginal Graduate Education group was valuable both in improving my abilities as a student researcher, but more so in finding avenues to increase my accountability to the larger Aboriginal community.

The relational approach was the way I used to avoid power asymmetry issues. This was the essential way by which I, as non-Aboriginal researcher, became enabled to facilitate indigenist research. The process is rooted in relationality, and, as Stairs (2004) has said:

[I developed a] growing consciousness that I am being studied as I study; that I am being taught as I teach; that whatever we are doing together is a hermeneutic, or, in an indigenous colleague's term, synergistic, a human activity; that we are both-all-Other to each other, even as we build deep and long relationships in the spirit of the two-row wampum. The classic, often trivial, and even hypocritical version of multiculturalism has no remaining meaning as we move slowly, and not without angst and confusion, beyond power-based and exclusive to relational and imaginative Indigenous-Other thinking, feeling, and spirit." (pp. 114–115)

The relational aspect I speak of could be said to be similar to what O'Riley (2004) has named *equivalency*. "Research might then recognize Aboriginal knowings and practices as equivalent conversations, and would support Aboriginal peoples in gaining control of research into their

lives” (p.93). Equivalency can help enlarge the avenues of revitalization of knowledges, self-determination, self-respect, and do so without having to answer to a hierarchical standard of ordering investigations into the very aspects of one’s life that is life-giving. To speak about the strength of the family, the clan, and one’s own identity without having to do so in ways that are disconnected from one’s own traditions is to have agency, to act freely, and to do so without needing to answer to anyone in a power relationship. The relational aspect of our indigenist research approach makes our conversations possible in respectful and loving ways. It makes it possible to sidestep the problems of power differentials because ultimately, what happens, and how it happens, in the research process is wholly owned and directed by the family. The family sets the tone and opens the spirit of the research.

In the pilot project, establishment of equivalency and relationality in the ways by which conversations occurred was natural and in keeping with long-established patterns of family/clan interactions and traditions. The time for the Talking Circle was seemingly spontaneous, and the major work that was required of me was to be still, listen, and wait without anxiety for the right time to unfold. The timing was generated by family elders who opened the discussions, and made clear that anyone could participate or not participate. The prayers and smudge were accompanied by the traditional gifts of tobacco that I gave as I explained why I was there and what I was asking for. Simply put, I was asking their permission to engage in a study with them on a topic they had long been working on—revitalizing their family/clan strength and identity. I wanted to know more about how they perceived their

strength and resilience, and I wanted to know if they would be willing to explore that with me in an academic research structure.

The timing was exactly as it needed to be, and I found myself active in taking notes, listening, asking only a few questions, while the family discussion flowed around me. Afterwards, some family members came to me and told me they did not want to sign the permission forms I had brought but were still interested in knowing about what we were doing. Others came and asked if they could sign the permission forms and participate even if they were not there for the pilot project Talking Circle. Several people instructed me on where I needed to go next and who I needed to talk to, and I ended up following the time at the family reunion with an unexpected trip four hours further north to a community where family members lived who had not been able to travel to the reunion. There my husband and I were greeted with a feast and more discussions about the project, all of which was an unexpected part of forming the research project. The flow of all of this was invigorating as I opened myself to a process that took on a life of its own in the years following the pilot project. The family research seemed to form itself and inform me on what was needed and how this was to happen.

The relationship of study is rooted in the geographical location where family roots extend back thousands of years, in the historical and contemporary political and social realities that shape the lives and identities of family members, and in the stories belonging to the family/clan that shape their multiplicity in location and identity. There are strong connections to Scottish and French ancestors, and family members have included into their family circle the partners, step-children, spouses, and friends whose origins are in First Nations other than Anishnaabe, as well

from non-native backgrounds. Members of the family have worked, studied, and traveled across Canada and internationally. All family members were aware to one degree or another that a project was taking place. The formulation of questions to be explored in the larger research evolved from family input during the pilot project.

#### 4.6 Procedure of organizing the family journey: process, participant selection, questions<sup>15</sup>

In the summer of 2010, I traveled two days from home to the bi-annual family/clan reunion. Time had been set aside for those family members who chose to participate in the research project to have a Talking Circle focusing on the research questions. A second Talking Circle was held later at another location to accommodate a few participants who were unable to travel to the first Talking Circle, with total of 24 family members participating.<sup>16</sup>

In the summer of 2011, I traveled between several First Nations and small towns in northwestern Ontario, conducting interviews with participants drawn from the family member participants in the Talking Circles of 2010. Additionally, several other family members were recommended for interviews and consented, so the snowball sampling for selection of participants contributed to a richer representation of members of family branches. In total, nine family members, selected from four main branches of the family, were interviewed. Two generational levels were represented, and the interviews were with men and women, on reserve and off reserve, and included those whose first language was Anishnaabemowin, French, or

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<sup>15</sup> See Appendices

<sup>16</sup> Details of how the Talking Circles proceeded are elaborated on in Chapter 5.



English. All of the interviewees had at least some knowledge of Anishnaabemowin, although only a few had some level of fluency. The interviews were conducted in English at locations chosen by the interviewees. Clan lineage for Anishnaabe peoples follows the paternal line, so only family members (male and female) who identified as members of the original male-lineage clan were interviewed individually. Other clans are represented in the extended family.

The nine interviews gathered from the interviewees were recorded on audio and a literal transcription was made of each interview. In excerpts from both Talking Circles and interviews used in the dissertation, ellipses indicate that a portion of the transcription has been left out. Copies of the complete literal transcriptions of individual interviews were provided to each interviewee, all of whom indicated the transcription of their words was acceptable. Copies of the Talking Circles transcripts were not circulated to all participants of the Talking Circles.

During the following year, 2011–2012, I received feedback from two of the participants regarding their interview, participated in several other family functions and a Naming Ceremony, and attended three pow wows and other community events on the three reserves where family members hold membership. (Not all family members or participants live on reserve.) The Family Report was given at the July 2012 Family/Clan Reunion. Since the Family Report belongs solely to the family, it is not included in the results.

#### 4.7 Analysis of information gathered

The following Chapter 5 is the analysis section described briefly below. In a traditional native learning process there is no linear, segmented approach to finding out about something; rather,

there is a circular turning over of observation, thoughts, ideas, considerations, and open-ended conclusions that can always be re-examined in the next moment as sharing continues to unfold. No conclusion is frozen in time, but is repeatedly re-examined through experience that is always growing and shifting in perspective. Similar processes also occur in empirical research approaches, although structured differently.

The family/clan revitalization process is something new to be analyzed in the sense that there is awareness among family members that something transformative is occurring, but there is no clear map in the mind as to how to proceed. It is sometimes difficult to fully comprehend what it is that is happening or needs to happen. This emergent process requires time and patience to analyze fully. Several layers are at work: because so much has been lost in terms of past traditions, patterns, known standards of behavior, and so forth, there is a sense in the family that a process of relating again following the rupture will take a very long time, may mean something different to different individuals in the family, and may even mean divergences in participation. There is a sense of uncertainty about how to proceed and what it all means. The family research project is part of the process of trying to understand all the changes and what is required ahead.

The journey of the research project to learn more about *mishkauziwin* is not something that can be adequately analyzed separate from the description of the process that is taken. The whole project can only be understood by trying to look at the topic in a recursive manner, each step informing the other steps, past and future, and returning to “look again” as the teachings of the

West Door of the Medicine Wheel instruct. This circular way of learning and researching is in keeping with the principles of Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 2001).

In Narrative Analysis, the talk that represents the partial reality (Riessman, 1993) is examined through a mutual process of constructing meaning. This is where the relationship between the family participants and the primary researcher must be deeply rooted in a relationship of study so that the spoken words, when recorded and deeply read, can reflect the meanings as the participants understand them. The stories told become the sites where meaning is constructed (McIsaac, 2000). Gheorghiu (2011) writes, “This knowledge is situational and constructed in the interaction between narrator and interviewer” (p. 33). The construction of knowledge in this manner makes it possible to view what is gained as a portal into a larger truth, representing realities that cannot be accessed by a more linear method.

Phenomenology does not solely seek to answer “why” questions, and, like narrative analysis, provides for an in-depth look at the essence of experience (Creswell, 2007, p. 79; Pawluch, Shaffir, & Miall, 2005). This fits well with indigenist research approaches, which avoid divisive search for cause and effect and focus on “what is.” Elders’ teachings emphasize that the “what” questions are preferred to the “why” questions because they avoid blame and judgment and are more likely to engender connective processes “that [generate] information sharing, decision making, supportive connections, and strategies that seek balance according to Native views” (Nabigon et al., 1999). Phenomenology also can encompass indigenist research facilitating construction of meaningful creative representations of their experiences (Lavallée, 2009).

Braiding together these approaches, as the primary researcher listens, inquires, records, and reflects the unfolding learning process, gives structure to what the family is attempting to do in the investigation of its *mishkauziwin* through participating in the research project. The effort towards revitalizing the family/clan identity does not end when the research ends. It continues into the future and is part of what has come before in a living process existing paradoxically in a past-present-future.

#### 4.8 Summary

The conceptual approach and process of an interdisciplinary/qualitative/indigenist study braids together complementary ways of research from the world of indigenous knowledges and the Western academy. This approach helps avoid potentially damaging effects of power differentials arising from the colonial processes to which Aboriginal peoples have been subjected, and allows the perspectives of the participating Anishnaabe family to come to the forefront. Interdisciplinary foundations allow for issues of complexity to be handled in a culturally safe manner as both researcher and participants work to illuminate knowledge regarding resilience—*mishkauziwin*.

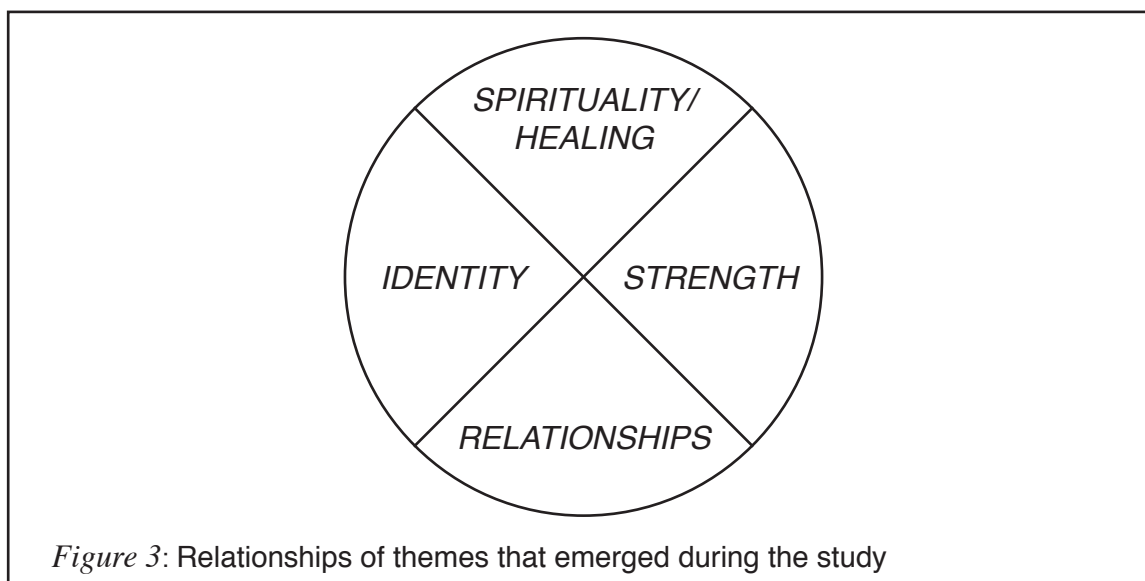
In the ceremony of research, the family directs the research project via relationships of study established in keeping with traditional protocols, and respecting requirements of the university. This method of using the collaborative, participatory nature of the research, grounded in an indigenist approach, facilitates a holistic emergence of learning and understanding as the family explores their *mishkauziwin*.

## Chapter 5

### 5 Results of the study

This chapter describes themes, patterns, and metaphors that emerged as family participants explored their understandings of their *mishkauziwin* (strength; resilience). Building strength in relationships is seen as part of the continuation of family/clan identity, and connection to territory. Spirituality and healing emerge as a significant component of *mishkauziwin*. This is related to risk and protective factors in the unfolding of survival, adaptation and resilience as the family strives to overcome the effects of colonization. The research process showed that gaining knowledge together about their identity was significant to the family participants. The synthesis and critical analysis of the researcher looks at the results in light of previous research on resilience.

#### 5.1 Emergent themes, patterns, and metaphors



Our story began with a metaphor of a canoe traveling through fog-covered waters to a place where different paths intersect. I imagined the travelers emerging and meeting where all the different directions intersected in a place where there could be a remembering and sharing of stories from the journey, a place where accounts of strength, identity and survival could be told in uncontested, sacred space, building trust for the journey ahead. The path I traveled in this research took years, and took me to places I had not imagined or understood, and as I sorted through the things I learned, and examined the conversations I had recorded, I learned that it was not so much what was learned along the way, but it was in the experience of the learning journey that I came to trust in the process more than the content. Trusting in my own instincts and intuitions was a big hurdle as I faced the challenge of personal change and growth. Finding ways to share our relationship of study in a manner that best represented the learning process was a steep learning curve. We travelled through the challenges of historical and cultural diversity, and the foggy terrain of our relationships, and emerged at a location where we could share our understandings in meaningful and mutual ways.

Initially, after the Talking Circles and interviews and their transcription, I needed to find a way to understand what it was that I had in front of me. I tried diligently to use NVIVO, a qualitative data analysis software program, sorting through the information gathered to find threads, themes and representations of what we had brought forward. I was searching for meanings and patterns, and as they emerged I began to see the limitations of relying solely on the NVIVO process to help decipher core concepts that were emerging. It became clear to me that using my mind and heart to allow the material to flow through my own “brain-assisted”

process was the best way to engage with and analyze the material. I resisted referring to what I had recorded and learned as “data” because it was not static inanimate material that could be quantified, segmented, measured and distilled through the usual empirical approaches. I found myself letting the NVIVO rest while I immersed myself in the content of the recordings, over and over, until every waking and dreaming moment was saturated with glimpses of patterns, themes and ideas of relationships.

Empirical science searches for the beautiful symmetry in natural and mechanical systems in ways that are simple, yet elegant, to understand in detailed and precise manner exactly what is present in our world of complex systems. Indigenous ways of researching, learning, and knowing do not necessarily discount the views and methods of empirical science, but lend acknowledgement and recognition to what we do not yet know, or cannot express or accept, regarding those matters in the liminal world of spirit which humans can encounter but not measure. Our study on the perceptions of *mishkauziwin* and what it means to this family/clan borders on this liminal field, and thus, the process of analyzing what we learned is both simple and not simple. Little is straightforward, yet the core, or the essence, of what we learned has a character of basic simplicity and beauty in its complexity.

The complexity of indigenous knowledge systems emerge from thousands and hundreds of years of complex encounter with “the field” (the natural world and daily life) and are distilled through intricate oral knowledge and transmission systems of observation and refinement of expression. Through the generations of living in a specific place, an intimately known territory,

with a highly refined organizing system of clans, the Anishnaabe peoples developed a deep and abiding consciousness of a sacred connection to their land.

The history of the family included dramatic disruptions in orientation, and the destruction of the organizing system of the clans went to the heart of their consciousness. The lifestyle and language that once existed and informed their souls is gone, their territory is layered with the non-natural structures of roads, industry, mines and all the other trappings of the modern world, the self-governance that once existed through the clans no longer functions, and families have been deeply fractured by the residential schools disaster (Regan, 2010). Attempting now to restore the internal reference of a family/clan and revitalize a consciousness that nourishes the heart of identity is a daunting endeavor against the backdrop of an externally referenced world requiring new ways of survival, and offering new ways to flourish.

The core issues for me began to organize themselves around the concerns of: *“Who are we? What happened to us? How was this allowed? How did things get this way? What do we have remaining? Where do we stand? How do we move forward?”* In the family pursuit of understanding and knowing more about these concerns I found a far more complex set of tasks playing out. This was not a quest for a reductionist answering of the simple question, “Why?” but was a search for coherence in experience, a search toward integration of past and present experiences that were both confusing and contested. In a sense, this was another aspect of the struggle between separateness and connectedness and the human need for identity— to know who one is and how one is placed in the world. These two desires formed the drive and agency



of the family members who had a clear sense that they had “belongingness,” but a less clear sense of exactly where that came from, how it manifested, and what that meant.

The desire for connection and knowledge had formed the basis of their efforts to revitalize their family/clan identity several decades ago. I came to see the reunions as the avenue toward agency and mastery over the slippery place in which the family had found itself after many, many generations of colonization. The gatherings mediated their quest for reconnection and understanding. The family was engaged in an organic process of creating a new story, a new way of connecting which echoed the past and had potential to create sustainable relationships extending into the future strongly and clearly in the same way as they saw their life together extending into the past.

The still murky quality of the story is simply a natural effect of a struggle to overcome effects of cultural and identity destruction rooted in the colonial experience, and the family’s experience of being caught up in an ongoing colonial project in contemporary political realities touching on issues of economics, territory and self-governance. The economic concerns of survival have changed in their lifetimes from a manageable and sustainable coexistence in a specific location in territory, in a natural world intimately known, to a demanding and complex set of interactions with an external world that has few safe avenues for entry. Not everyone in the family system has been able to manage the dialectical stretch required for a sustainable coexistence with that external world marked by modernity, yet the family as a whole has been mostly able to remain connected despite the tenuous nature of their world.

In some dimensions the work of the family/clan revitalization can be seen as an aspect of a grieving process moving towards transformation. The grieving is ongoing and is rooted in a sense that they as a family and a clan have been caught up in rigorous genocidal processes directed at Aboriginal peoples by the dominant society, and the family/clan identity is now beginning to bring forth again the strength which has always been present. The family/clan reunions are a way of celebrating and reclaiming what they have always had and can now let flourish again.<sup>17</sup>

The grieving process of this family also includes the residential schools experience. It is not apparent that this family/clan revitalization effort has ever included a singular focus on their experiences in residential schools, but several family members have participated in the Truth and Reconciliation process at the level of speaking out publicly. Healing the family has been the focus, and sharing personal stories about residential school experiences are an aspect of that. Every member of the family is acquainted, to one degree or another, with the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. One interview respondent asked that I read several books he had that were published by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but he was the only family member in possession of those books.<sup>18</sup> The material in these books deepened my

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<sup>17</sup> Rony Blum (2005), in *Ghost brothers: Adoption of a French tribe by bereaved Native America*, discusses in depth the transgenerational and transcultural aspects of the adaptation to bereavement in Native society historically. Her work has contributed to my thinking as I have attempted to understand what I learned from family members.

<sup>18</sup> *Response, Responsibility, and Renewal: Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Journey*. Edited by Gregory Younging, Jonathan Dewar and Mike DeGagné. Published by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2009. Ottawa. *From Truth to Reconciliation: Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools*. Edited by Marlene Brant Castellano, Linda Archibald, and Mike DeGagné. Published by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2008, Ottawa.

understanding of what family members meant when they referred to the issue of genocide. I developed sensitivity in listening for the theme of grief, informed by the focus of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

I began to see that perceptions of *mishkauziwin* were integrally wrapped up with ideas of family and clan, intertwined, however vague and uncertain this conceptualization may be to various family members. The interaction processes of the reunions and the relationship networks, which did flourish within the family, facilitated relearning and restoring, or “re-storying” of the family/clan identity. The legacy of the residential school experience was not a predominate theme but formed a constant backdrop to the lives of everyone in the family. The distillation process of our learning together opened me to understandings in a liminal fashion which provided glimmers of light into what it means to be a family restoring itself following erosion of family networks and locations in ways only vaguely remembered.

I saw that the perceptions of *mishkauziwin* flowing through the family meant strength in relationships, in identity, and in healing and spirituality. Only secondarily did it imply socioeconomic status of any sort, and while some family members point with pride to those relatives who have achieved great success economically or professionally as evidence of their strength, it is equally true that those members who can still speak their language, and tell stories of trapping and hunting, and are still able to gather wild food carry high esteem. No family member, no matter their disability or difficulty, is perceived in a “less than” manner, and those who have survived the ravages of residential schools, addictions, illnesses and poverty are admired for their strength of endurance and looked upon as valuable relatives,

important to the network. It is important to remember those who have passed on, especially if they died in a residential school or other institution. The 2010 Reunion was dedicated to a family member who died as a child in an institution far from home, with no one in the family being notified until long after his funeral. It took 40 years to find the grave, but in a spiritual sense, he finally came home in 2010 to celebrate with his family reunion by the shores of a northern lake.

The family reunions are the core of restoring their identity. The *mishkauziwin* comes “from within” and each individual story contributes to *mishkauziwin* of the larger family itself. Being part of that family, in one way or another, brings aspects of that *mishkauziwin* to each member. No one is forgotten, including those now in the Spirit world—family extends in all directions of past-present-future, and the members of the family who had passed on are as much a part of the present as are descendants yet to be born. There is a sense of the timelessness of the family that is a given, and a “knowing” that what is done and learned in the here-and-now is integral to the health and strength of what is to come, just as the strength of the past is realized in the present. What follows in the rest of this chapter are excerpts from the information gathered which demonstrate the perceptions of *mishkauziwin* among family members, and ideas of what this means to them.

On July 31, 2010 when the family began the research project with me as the primary researcher we met at the family/clan reunion and started in a traditional way, in keeping with how E.Y.

had taught the family. An Elder held the Family Staff,<sup>19</sup> introduced me and opened the first Talking Circle with a traditional smudging ceremony. I presented offerings of small traditional gifts to each person present that represented my commitment to conduct the research with respect for the work and meaning of the sacred Medicines—tobacco, sage, sweetgrass, and cedar. I indicated my respect and honor for the stories shared, and my commitment to follow the direction of the family in my conduct throughout the long process, consulting with family members in decisions and interpretations. At the same time, the family members present agreed to provide their signatures on the official forms I brought (see Appendix C) indicating that they were willing to trust me to work with them in a good way, and to allow me to proceed as I needed to in order to fulfill academic requirements. Some family members questioned why this was necessary, but the Elder explained it in a way that allowed them to extend this indication of trust to me, thus providing true “informed consent” for the reason for the study:

*This is a real contribution to our understanding of clan . . . we are putting on paper who we are, our knowledge of the clan . . . what is our clan? (HE1).*

I distributed the list of questions we would work with and then remained quiet, working on listening and recording as the Talking Circle proceeded. Now, in recounting my experience with the Talking Circle, it seems fairly simple and straightforward, but the actual experience at the time was far different, requiring me to stretch my capacity to be flexible. The Talking

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<sup>19</sup> A tall, carved wooden staff that has had decorations added to it over the years. It is passed from family to family. Responsibility for the next reunion is assumed when it is accepted. It has a metaphorical and ceremonial function, and the family holding it for the two years between reunions has obligations to keep it carefully and respectfully and care for it as one would care for the family.

Circle lasted approximately 1½ hours, but there was a long lead up time of people hanging around and talking before it finally coalesced, and again afterward, when people kept coming to me and talking with each other about the research. Instead of being held indoors in a room where I could do an audio recording, people preferred not to record, and wanted to sit outdoors next to the lake where the children were playing. There was bright sun and a strong wind the whole time, with the wind in the trees and the waves from the lake making a lot of noise, along with children laughing, playing and running in and out of the Circle to talk with their grown-ups. Given the environmental conditions, on reflecting back, it feels almost miraculous that we were able to sustain a Circle for as long as we did with so many people being able to share, but it also felt at the time perfectly appropriate for the spirit of the Circle. The following quotes are drawn from my notes and reflect the perception of the meaning of *mishkauziwin* as strength:

*It was important . . . to know how a family should be . . . our family role is to show these strengths. (TF1)*

*There is definitely strength from here, from all over. (JN1)*

*Granny showed how to be strong and stay together . . . Just being part of this family gives you strength because of how close we are. (CO1)*

*I guess this is how we have strength to raise our family . . . this is for us, for the family to stay together to give us strength. (GE1)*

*I heard this word mishkauzee [means] strong heart—our people have that strong heart to not give up . . . the will to not give in . . . the strength to overcome. (KN1)*

*That taught me strength of closeness . . . here's a story: E and C were trapping around [a] mine and C killed a bear with a club, woke him up, bear got hold of him [in the] snow and pulled him in the den and the three of them<sup>20</sup> fought it off . . . in the winter. (JO1)*

*I picked up on it. . .the powerful [ones] are the women, resilient, they are shakers, doers, make things happen. . .people look into the families and see [these] women are powerful! (ANI)*

*[I] always recognized the strong women in our clan. . .by themselves raising their families[and] the residential schools. . .I didn't get[understand] the hurt till I got my kids. . .I went there when I was 5½ years . . .me and L were taken. . .Mom never cried, never showed emotions—[that] gave me strength over there. (FO1)*

The expressions and beliefs regarding strength and power are not abstract, and are grounded in practical events and concrete experiences. There is a sense that strength exists in and of itself as that which supports family function and identity. This, in turn, creates the *mishkauziwin*, which manifests family strength in their interactive processes and individual behaviors.

*Mishkauziwin* in this sense takes on a life of its own and is its own evidence while at the same time it lends to a process of further development of *mishkauziwin* in a recursive manner.

At the second Talking Circle, which was held several weeks later at a different reserve, only one participating member was present from the first Talking Circle, and only two branches of

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<sup>20</sup>Initials refer to the three sons of Granny.

the family were represented. We began the second Circle in the same way as at the first Talking Circle, but with a smaller group in attendance. Several of the family members who had agreed to participate who lived at this reserve were ill, and one of the elders who had helped to organize the research project had died a few months previously, and thus, some people chose not to be in the Circle, feeling it was too soon for them. Again, the same themes emerged regarding strength, evident in the following excerpts from my notes:

*I may not remember because my life was trauma. . . strength came. . . I sought to find out who I was. . . I struggled because I didn't know who I was [in] my first Fast. Something happened, I came back, I had a tradition . . . I gained strength. . . I do feel strong now. I got my strength from the [Clan Spirit name]. (DNI)*

*How do you sustain it [mishkauziwin]? By our own personal relationships it tells us who we are and the relationship sustains . . . that's what keeps us strong. (HE1)*

*We seem to be getting stronger . . . strong in healing and getting strong [through] a lot of humor. (DMI)*

*It's natural inside of us—that is strength—something inside that comes out. . . They see that in you. . . and learn to share that strength coming. (DNI)*

From the two Talking Circles I drew nine individuals who agreed to have a private interview—two or three participants from each family line. The oldest surviving male elder spoke of *mishkauziwin* in his interview as the “Ojibway word meaning strength” (HE1). He went on to say:



*As far as I understand, mishkauzee relates to your inner strength, your inner strength that you carry with you and how that strength relates to your Dodem, your clan. (HE1)*

Throughout his interview the concepts he holds of his clan identity are interwoven with his understanding of strength, or *mishkauziwin*, and are grounded in the traditional teachings and understandings of the natural world, handed down to him by Elders who trained him over a period of years:

*Over time that brings you the strength that you need to survive and that's what the [Dodem] teaches its young, and it teaches the clan to be strong so you could survive and do what you need to do in your community to keep it strong. (HE1)*

Throughout the interviews, this theme emerged repeatedly as participants voiced their belief that because of their identity in their clan they had an inherent strength passed to them from time immemorial to fulfill the role of being strong for the community and to bring strength to the people. As the Elder said:

*You don't suddenly get up one day and say, "I'm going to have mishkauzee." It's a process through different stages of life, eh? But there's the children's stage, the youth, adult and elder, eh? And so all my life, I learnt that responsibility for yourself comes in many different forms . . . And over time that's what builds mishkauzee . . . you identify with that membership and then you provide relationships to build the clan into a strong working unit, eh? That will not falter from survival instincts and from sharing and for being strong for yourself and others. (HE1)*

There are additional patterns emerging such as the relationship between *mishkauziwin* and the connections within and between families, in addition to aspects of spirituality, clan membership, traditional knowledge, caring, and survival. The following quotes from individual interview participants represent their perceptions of *mishkauziwin* as strength:

*The little bit that I know now I see how that strength is being carried out by our past experiences and the way we carried on as family as members of the clan. And it seems that we are always initiating different things that create unity and strength in our family. We overcome obstacles—much quicker than I see other people for some reason.*(DN1)

*Yeah, but, I have learned a few things and the teachings that I learn today are almost similar to what my father was telling me already . . . the strength of a family at our home, like, we got our strength from our parents and . . . we got strength from having a balance in life. That was strength, like, say if you had spirituality that would have been a strength to carry on.* (AM)

*Oh, yeah, we talk amongst ourselves. . . what gives us strength, and even some of my own relatives, like, I guess my first cousins, I would consider them brothers growing up with them. . . we have comments, what made us who we are, whatever we are, and about our family oriented, or how a relation means something. You know it has some kind of significance . . . the whole resilience is just trying to get your roots—always knowing your roots. Yeah, because imagine a person that's all alone, or with no one. You*

*wonder where they can get their strength from . . . you talk about strength, you have to go after what you want, you have to be satisfied, you have to be happy—that is where you get your strength from [if] you give up or forget about it, or you could, could look like there is a sense of weakness, I guess. . . try to make sure you are happy yourself, because I had a really strong tie with my grandfather and definitely, sure, and that is what makes me talk about the strength and resilience is, you just pass that same type of examples onto them. (JO)*

*Yeah, so, yeah, I think the, ah, the strength of the family, I really think it really does begin with my Granny . . . she kept us together . . . the family is very strong. And it's not only because of numbers . . . the strength of our family comes from pure, genuine, sincere love!(CO1)*

*I suppose the mishkauzee is something always within us, but through life as we travel . . . people go through those obstacles and it's like within you. . . when you're at a low or something you're, in your life it goes back to you. Like me, how I almost—I survived a near death experience . . . I only know no other way to explain it, just, ah, within you I suppose. Like, it's up to the person themselves whether they wanna tap into it, the spirit of it. (KO1)*

He goes on to speak of traditional activities as being a source of his strength:

*It's unexplainable but the strength I get from it when I feel that times where hope is needed, you know? . . . It gives me courage to overcome things . . . I'm going to need that strength, the strength within . . . I need it. (KO1)*

*And I think that a lot of the strength comes from our elders in the family. . . I got a lot from my dad, you know, guiding me through life, and a lot from my grandparents. . . living out in the bush with them. . . Those are some of my experiences getting strong, and getting mishkauzee. (DM1)*

*It's only now that I'm really aware of all of the spiritual strength that we have in our family . . . I'm still figuring out what my role is in that. I know I have a role in that somehow. . . also my Indian name is (omitted for confidentiality) and it's such a strong name. . . that helps me understand who I am because I think that's the biggest piece for me. . . because I do believe that I'm a very strong person. I often wonder why I was. Why did I make it this far? Like, how did I get here? [With] every odd stacked against me . . . there's lots of potential for growth and healing, and you know, and sharing of strength. (MNG)*

This participant also expressed many questions about why she saw herself as so strong and wondered what had happened with other family/clan members who were struggling with serious problems and seemed not able to heal, and show strength. She didn't have answers to that and wondered why they had not been able to go beyond their difficulties when she had been able to overcome and get a good education. There is the sense here of the perspective of

*mishkauzee* as strength to overcome and keep moving forward despite difficulties, where for some of the other interviewees, strength is demonstrated by endurance despite difficulties or dysfunction, and is less individualistic:

*When I look at mishkauzee, the resiliency of the clan, I look at how its, how each of us came upon, you know what the clan, what our clan was, and what the meaning of that was, because as growing up, we really didn't use, or utilize the word clan . . . but it was always there . . . that's why I believe this, you know part of me is stronger . . . And then when we began our gatherings, my brother also . . . started feeling that we needed the family to get, to become stronger.(BNS)*

She spoke of a grandmother whom she described as the epitome of strength:

*I was just always impressed with her strength, her creativity . . . I always remember that part of her . . . she had that, you know, to visit, to connect with each of her children, like that connection and how she kept that strong. (BNS)*

She also spoke of exercising her strength when she participated in traditional dancing and doing traditional things specifically to be a model for children and young people. She felt it was important to maintain clan gatherings so that strength itself, and the strength of the family, could be passed on.

### 5.1.1 *Mishkauziwin* and family/clan reunions: building relationships, gathering strength

The family/clan reunion is a marker in the lives of extended family members, and has become established as a routine and expected event that occurs bi-annually and is looked forward to and relied upon as a time to gather. It is a satisfying and pleasurable event, which can also include some ceremonial components, and is structured as a clean and sober family event. One participant described the reunions in a simple, elegant way:

*The reunion, we don't allow alcohol or drugs in there, and we just kept together. We played games; we do different things. We do canoeing, ya know. Some of the guys go fishing. Wherever we are, whatever reunion we are, we have different activities planned there. And they do have sharing circles by the fire in the evenings, you know, whoever's just there when[ever]—comes sit around and talks.(DM1)*

A major event anticipated during the reunion is the Giveaway Ceremony, and families invest significant time, work and money into gathering the items they will contribute to the Giveaway blanket. When the 2–4 day gathering is over, it is time to circle around the blanket where generous gifts are spread out—a large variety of toys and clothing, crafts and tools, blankets, coats, or artwork, and items such as medicine wheels, dream catchers, and smudge sticks. Sometimes when a family member cannot be present for the Giveaway someone is designated to choose a gift to pass on to the missing person. Children are the first to choose what they want from the blanket, and people make sure that age appropriate gifts are available. One at a time, people carefully choose what they are drawn to.

The Giveaway either precedes or follows the final Feast. It is the responsibility of the host families to provide the food for the feast, enough for everyone there. Some years perhaps only 50 people will be present for the feast, other times it may be as many as 150. At one of the family/clan reunions that I attended, several members of the host family spent long hours fishing and collecting wild meat over the months preceding the gathering, which was then contributed to the Feast.<sup>21</sup> Each one is different but all include the sacred responsibility to prepare a Spirit Dish and say a prayer. Someone, either adult or child, is designated to take a plate before anyone eats, and put a taste of each food item from the feast onto the plate that is taken into the bush after a Smudging Ceremony and prayer by an Elder.<sup>22</sup> Only then do people begin to eat, and the elders (over 50) eat first, with younger family members sometimes serving the elderly or infirm family members who have difficulty ambulating. These rituals around feasting are standard and reliable customary activities surrounding feast events at family/clan gatherings. The very young children are instructed how to manage their behaviors and show respect for what is happening and for the elders. No food (even from an individual's plate) is ever thrown into the trash—leftovers are either put into the bush or sacred fire, or distributed among the people who are going home.

There are three main reserves in the family/clan treaty regions in which families are registered, and the family/clan reunions usually cycle between the different reserves. Although they are

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<sup>21</sup>The timeless persistence of cooperative activities around food gathering is evidenced in these family events, demonstrating resilience of customs and behaviors.

<sup>22</sup>An *Elder* is someone recognized by the family as carrying special spiritual and leadership responsibilities in the family/clan, and can be of any age, but is generally someone who is *elderly*. Many *elderly* members of the family are passing away, and a few younger members are stepping into the role of *Elder*.

not always held on a reserve, they are always held in the traditional territory of the family/clan, which spans a large region of northwestern Ontario and encompasses several treaty areas. Historically, their clan was one of many clans of the larger Anishnaabe Nation of that region and many family members who have moved away still consider the region their territory.

Sometimes a reunion will be held near the time of the pow wow in the community of the hosting family branch, making it easier for families who travel the “Pow Wow Trail” to participate. Upon occasion, a reunion will be shortened to accommodate extended family situations, as evidenced by a near tragic event at the 2012 Reunion. Several young people had gone fishing and did not return at the expected time. When I returned to the gathering the following morning I learned that one young person had been taken to hospital, having survived a serious accident when returning to the camp. Many people left early and the closing Circle, Give-Away Ceremony and Feast were moved up in time. Only a handful of family members remained at the camp for the remainder of the planned time, and the relaxation around the campfire and swimming beach was subdued and overcast with concern. Prayers were said for the affected family, and in the days following many phone calls and social network contacts were made around the province inquiring how the injured young person was doing.

Sometimes additional ceremonial activities will be planned near the time of the reunion, such as a Naming Ceremony. The Family Report was given to the family/clan at the reunion in 2012, and following the feedback discussion one of the teenagers followed traditional protocol, offered tobacco to the Elder, and asked for a Spirit Name. In discussion with her parents a time was chosen for the Elder to travel some distance to their home and perform a traditional



Naming Ceremony a few weeks later. It was a time when her close family, including cousins, nieces and nephews, half-siblings, aunts and grandmother gathered at her parents' home in the country for a feast and traditional teachings, and shared songs, drumming, memories, stories, dreams, questions and ideas. The family agreed that they would like to have more times such as this in the future. Their family branch is growing larger, becoming scattered across several provinces and the father expressed his thoughts that there may come a time in the future when they will just have their own gatherings. His mother is the last surviving daughter of one of the original three brothers, and there is a heightened sense of the shortness of time the family will still have her with them. The other adults express feeling a need to know traditional teachings better to be able to carry on their traditions even after the Elders have all passed on. New family members will need to be prepared to carry on the roles of the Elders in the future.

It is clear that the family/clan reunions are significant in strengthening relationships among the branches of the family, as well as within smaller family units. The individual benefits received in this process are significant. During the initial pilot project one of the participants in the Talking Circle expressed, with tears, the sense that he had never felt like he really belonged in the family until he started attending the reunions. The feeling of belonging was something very precious to him and he attributed it to gaining a sense of identity directly through the reunion process. The *mishkauziwin* that is at the heart of the family/clan, and the perception that knowledge about one's clan is essential, is perceived as being connected with the reunions, the times of gathering together.

The renewal of knowledge, strength, and identity organized around the reunion and clan knowledge is a theme that emerged from the Talking Circles and individual interviews, represented by the following quotes:

*When I learned about the role of the clan it was humbling and made me proud [we were] chieftains, leaders in our community. (CO1)*

*[Our clan] is our family.(JO1)*

*It identifies who we are—your job for the community. (CO1)*

*[We managed] internal affairs of the community. Historically we fed the people, managed resources of the community through the food . . . The Pipe Carrier feeds spiritual food to communities. [Our Dodem] likes our ceremonies. (HE1)*

*I didn't know what a clan was [growing up]. I heard more and was proud when I was told by C our family was [Clan Spirit name]—that's nice—gee it's nice . . . every time I see the [Clan Spirit name]oh that's US!! . . . Oh, I feel good! (GE1)*

*I'm proud to be . . . proud of this clan . . . makes me have honor . . . something to look up to, look to be part of. I don't know everything . . . the clan part—the clans were set up for the people so we don't mix, so we know who we are . . . broke it down into systems to deal with other groups. (KN1)*

*What is the clan? It lets us know where we belong. [It] helps us decide how we continue our nation . . . clan is one part of the nation . . . helps us decide who we marry,<sup>23</sup> our role. I didn't know nothing about clan till recently . . . we never had it growing up, no language, no teachings, no culture, but we were still able to be close . . . That growing up, we knew of our relatives from other places, we knew about it from him [relative's name] we had other relatives . . . even though we didn't know about clan [he] told us to have pride in your roots . . . many times as Anishnaabe we were grouped into other society . . . out of necessity in circumstances we lived through, it was necessary to support each other, look after the kids.(JO1)*

*We maybe took on White ways, but our [Clan Spirit name] was traditional . . . our ways were traditional because we honor our women . . . our fathers always put tobacco down, prayed, put food down . . . we were traditional!<sup>24</sup> (CN1)*

*I think we are a really intelligent strong clan, a lot of them succeed . . . It comes back to my mother, the most important thing is support and watch out and help each other . . . the family is not just mine, it's everyone.(FO1)*

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<sup>23</sup> In Anishnaabe tradition one may not marry within one's own clan. It is considered taboo, and is respected that way by traditional people today despite the loss of much clan knowledge. Some people who do not necessarily follow traditional teachings will still respect this taboo.

<sup>24</sup> "To put tobacco down" and "to put food down" is a reference to the traditional manner of making an offering to the Spirit world by placing tobacco or food on the ground, or near a tree, to acknowledge the spiritual reciprocity in/of prayer.

*The [Clan Spirit name] reunions were to get to know each other and who we're related to . . . I believe we keep this reunion going so the kids will know each other. (DM1)*

*[My Dad] he said . . . your clan was there for not only yourself, but the community . . . clans were there to create safe place to live and work . . . my father said that about clans . . . they did ceremony . . . especially my mother. (DN1)*

*What's important is the genetic connections . . . you find who you are related to . . . connections all over . . . finding out where they are [from]. The clan system I've learned from both sides of my family . . . The role of clans have fallen to the side today. It's more of a connection similar to genetic connections . . . the need has changed, the specific role for each clan now isn't so true—it's social and spiritual now . . . We're starting to get them [clans] back up again—starting with family . . . [back then it was] put them on reserves, don't let them hunt, then the mother and father can't look after the children anymore . . . slowly, slowly you gain that back by adapting . . . you change and adapt or you get left behind. [The clan is about] family, genetic connection, generation by generation the ability to teach your people to adapt . . . the clans had genetic structures to them. (DU1)<sup>25</sup>*

*The clan has a narrow definition . . . the way I look at it . . . from the macro level community to the individual level . . . the ability to change is critically important . . . my community and myself same level of personal and community ability to change . . .*

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<sup>25</sup> This is a family member married into the clan who comes from both Anishnaabe and European background. He followed Anishnaabe tradition and did not marry into his father's clan.

*healing takes on many forms . . . make it happen, go out and get some education, get a job, show some leadership . . . follow up on your comments, beliefs, who you are . . . you don't need a book, just believing you are part of that . . . Chi E.Y.<sup>26</sup> believed in that [and] worked hard on the reunions, organizing, did it with good humor, beautiful, strong, humble not arrogant . . . He was an exceptional man, he is with all our ancestors.(HE1)*

*[Our reunions] we kept it going the way E.Y. did—we run it the way he did, the sacred fire, the drumming circle, the sharing and talking and eating, getting to know who we are, the Give-Away. (DM1)*

*The family reunions were put together so we could get to know each other and relate to each other and talk about common concerns around the clan . . . Well, when we first started to gather nobody realized, we weren't sure why we were getting together, eh? Except it was just a good idea, something to do. And then over time . . . the younger members of that clan started to ask questions, well, what are they? What does the [Clan Spirit name] do? What's the purpose? . . . And then the Elders attempted to answer those questions on the purpose . . . it's no big mystery, eh? Clan is identifying with a certain symbol and the symbol in our case is the [animal] and we should honor that [animal] and give it thanks for its lessons by offering up tobacco when we see him.(HE1)*

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<sup>26</sup> *Chi* is Anishnaabemowin for *big*. It is often used to refer to the older of two people who have the same name.

Regarding reunions getting started:

*I was not personally involved, all I know was that I wanted to find about my [Clan Spirit name] clan, about myself . . . And I think it was a result of me becoming more aware of my identity as a Native person . . . I wanted to know deeper who I am. (DN1)*

She went on to talk at length about the private spiritual aspects of her connection with her animal *Dodem* and her feeling that the animal *Dodem* is part of the strength of the family. She expressed feeling that the actions she takes in her life come from her clan identity:

*There is a lot of strength that has evolved since our clan [reunions]. There is more love, there is more bonding, more reaching out, and umm . . . more supporting . . . there is just continuous growth . . . there is still some in my family that have no—they are aware, they are very knowledgeable . . . but they are not making use of whatever, but they are on good ground. (DN1)*

*And we were talking about how we didn't know our relatives. And we were talking about how long ago people knew who they were related to. The clans stick together and they did things together. So we started having [reunions] . . . my dad was still living and I remember my dad being so proud that everyone was together and, ah, we talked about that, just not knowing each other. And I think that is a very important part in the Native society is to know your relatives. People were clueless . . . My dad was telling about how they used to trap and how they used to travel. They had two gathering spots [names eliminated to protect anonymity] I don't understand how they could travel so*

*far away . . . and that is where the Anishnaabe used to gather in that area, once a year.*

*Isn't that amazing? . . . Yeah, but now we just travel by car, not by canoe. (AM1)*

This participant also went on to talk at length about spiritual aspects of her connection with her animal *Dodem* and the clan, and how that helps her in her feelings and actions:

*People might look up to us for it because we do the clan system, the [Clan Spirit name] clan gathering . . . those, our gatherings, or our family gathering like that—they seem to work.(AM1)*

She also spoke of things her father said to her about clans:

*He said we all had a clan system and he said that in a clan system the father had a clan and the mother had a clan. He says that—but you he says, “You are to follow the father’s clan, all the children are to follow their dad’s clan.” And the mom, like my mother, would keep her clan. So my kids, like my kids now are the [Clan Spirit name] Clan and I am the only one . . . and he said that clan kept us together. It kept us strong as a family. (AM1)*

*I don't truly understand the whole clan system, but I know there is a clan system that demonstrates what family you belong to and all that. To help order people in the community, but I just—listening to my elders and whatever, my parents, and grandfather . . . me and E.Y. used to have discussions . . . our families for some years didn't really know each other, eh? . . . Once in a while there would be an odd visit. . . And there was maintained that, ah, no marrying their close relations. And you look at*

*that today and a lot of times that happens because you don't follow the clan system."*

(JO1)

During the interview he expressed his thoughts on how the reunions served to get people to know other family members, but that now it seems to be changing, people are drifting away again. He feels that it is his connection to the land that gives him a sense of identity more than being connected with the reunions and a clan because he did not know his biological father and thus is connected with his mother's clan, not the natural way.

Another participant expressed her view of her process of gaining knowledge of her clan:

*Actually when the family reunions started and E.Y . . . he kind of got this all together—the family reunions—and he told us that we were of the [Clan Spirit name] but even then I didn't know what the [clan] meant, or what the role . . . was . . . It wasn't until years later that I came across it in some books . . . in our case . . . I think that it goes beyond that, and I don't know if it's the [animal], the clan, that I'm . . . referring to or just family . . . the family is very strong. And it's not only because of numbers.(CO1)*

She went on to explain that the family reunions demonstrate the love of the family. A young male interviewee spoke of the importance of symbolic functions in the family:

*It gives me a lot of pride, I know. And there are in my own life myself where things get hard and there'll be times where I reflect back to times like the reunion, times like growing up as a child and being a part of a culture and dancing, singing . . . I sure hope I can be one of them [that continues the reunions]. Because I know that the*



*Family Staff is currently with me, and it passes on from village to village as it goes, eh? Eventually soon I hope it comes back to me again if I'm still around I'll be here, ya know. (KN1)*

Later, speaking of his identification with his clan, he speaks of change:

*It's changing, you know . . . it's not the same—it's just constantly moving, right? And I see how . . . it could possibly be lost in a way, ya know? . . . I wanna keep it . . . it's dear to me, I love it, ya know. (KN1)*

Another participant explained:

*I learned about my clan through the beginning of the [Clan Spirit name] reunions. . . I think mostly what I've learned about our clan has been on my own . . . and actually some of [the Elder's] teachings . . . it would be personal growth, or my own development where I reflect on the clan and how it plays in who I am and . . . what my purpose is . . . it helps me to have an understanding of where my life paths has taken me and where, why I'm in the certain position I'm in now, because it's not an easy place to be . . . It's not through our family reunions that I've really gotten the teachings of our clan. (MNG1)*

She went on to discuss her extensive efforts to gain traditional and spiritual knowledge and meeting traditional Elders who directed her back to her family for knowledge. It surprised her to discover through people in other regions that her family/clan is viewed as being strong traditional leaders:

*I think it's really, really important that we keep those clan gatherings because you know if we don't our children won't, will become lost again. And, um, they will not have the strength of family, yeah; we carry this, and bring those role models to the reunions. I think that's another challenge, eh? To get them there, because so often people get so busy, eh? (MNG1)*

### 5.1.2 *Mishkauziwin* and identity: land, language and tradition

At the family/clan reunions most people speak with each other in the English language, which is now the predominant language spoken by family members. One of the family branches has intermarried with a northern Ontario Francophone family and some members of this family are fluently bilingual and send their children to French school. This is generally viewed by other family members as desirable, giving the children a better position in Canadian society for economic opportunity. Most family members still have a rudimentary knowledge of Anishnaabemowin and commonly use phrases or words in their normal conversation.

Traditional prayers, greetings and introductions are always said in Anishnaabemowin. Some of the older members of the family are fluent in their language, and a few family members are either language teachers or attempting to gain fluency in their language; however, it is not often that long conversations in Anishnaabemowin will be heard. There is usually some talk at the reunions regarding either the loss of the language, the use of the language, or restoring the language. There seems to be a general acknowledgement that this is desirable, yet at the same time in discussions it is recognized that the language is disappearing, and that it is inevitable with little which can be done. Discussion of the language issue was almost nonexistent in

responses in the Talking Circles and interviews. The references to what had been lost in the past usually included the language, but more often it was the loss of land and traditional culture that was referred to.

A sense of grief about what was gone is present, yet there is a stronger sense of what remains:

*We never had it growing up, no language, no teachings, no culture, but we were still able to be close. (JO1)*

The persistence of the identity continues despite losses. One participant in the second Talking Circle expressed the understanding that identity is indestructible:

*That happens with all indigenous people who have been pushed aside—they are slowly getting identity back . . . the old man in the bush helped me. (DU1).*

He went on to describe the story of The Hundredth Monkey, (Keyes, 1984), and stated that when he heard the story it gave him hope that dysfunction and communities could change. He emphasizes that education is the key to the future for identity restoration of the Anishnaabe Nation.

The theme of restoring identity, and its connection to *mishkauziwin*, is woven throughout references to land, language and traditional culture. Nurturing traditional knowledge and practices is seen as an avenue toward, or an aspect of, *mishkauziwin*. The cultural practices and activities such as dancing at pow wows, drumming, and smudging are all seen as part of family demonstrations of strength, and those in the family who are most active in these events are held in high esteem. One participant expressed it by saying,

*From what I've seen just by talking to families, like, our family is much more aware. They seem to, seem to be much more culturally aware, and I think also, from, you know, that sense of family is there, it's strong, that's been really nurtured, reinforced.*

(MNG1)

Other participants' statements are reflective of the links, or the relationships, between *mishkauziwin*, traditional culture, and identity as evidenced by the following quotes:

*Hmm, I suppose the culture, at large, like the larger spectrum of it, like the pow wows, the dancing, like being around it, I guess, just being around it . . . whether it was through education—like at the time when I was still using, I don't know what it was but I still went around the drum, and I would not sing,<sup>27</sup> but I mean, just to be around listening and, and in a way you might say you take it for granted but . . . now, ah, I look at that and I just think, well, I'm just glad I was there. 'Cuz that—it made me who—more closer, like, bring me back to who I am. (KN1)*

*Oh, yeah, for sure, I mean that is ah, [my wife] being a [language teacher] or even like you say, keeping them connected to their culture. It is not like I practice my culture every day, but as a native person, that identity—give them some identity to know who they are or where they come from. (JO1)*

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<sup>27</sup>Traditional teachings instruct people to not sing or play the drum when one has been using alcohol or drugs.

This respondent was discussing how important it was for him and his wife to pass on their Anishnaabe culture to their children and grandchildren. He went on to share his feelings about his connection to the land:

*Well, it helps me—know where I belong—or where I come from and it helps me—strengthens my roots in this area here, too . . . because this is where I was born and raised . . . even now it helps me to be an Aboriginal person and even in belief of being the First People having . . . God-given right to this land . . . it is all about our tie to the land here and who we are . . . we also care for the homeland at the same time. I have a sense of responsibility at the same time. Even though you don't have that control, or, you know, that you are always trying to gain or negotiate as an Aboriginal person. But the, there is still that balance I guess to where, where it, it sustains in a different way today, or it could, you know, sustain us in a different way than it did in the past or practicing hunting or fishing or anything else on the land . . . And you always wonder what it could have been like. But I mean, that is not the right way to wonder, but . . . it would have happened eventually I guess, it just . . . I mean, the whole resilience is just trying to get your roots—always knowing your roots. (JO1)*

*As a young girl I understood Ojibway 100% and I was also able to talk it and speak it [but] my parents did not teach us anything about our native way of life. We were now following the European way of life, or the white or the mainstream people . . . We were going to school now—we had a day school . . . there we had to speak our white language. Like the English language. We could not use our native language at all . . .*

*My Aunt [name omitted for confidentiality] says I used to talk fluent when I was a little girl. So I don't know. I speak it now, and I understand, but I can't speak it fluently—like to have a good conversation in Ojibway—I can't do that . . . that hurts me the most right now today that I couldn't teach my children . . . If they [parents] were really upset with us, it was all in Ojibway, you know, I remember that, and have that, to be that, mishkauzee—a strong person, you have to know yourself, you have to know where you came from. You have to understand [that] what happened to us [really] happened to us and you have to get all that back and I think that is why a lot of the kids are having a lot of problems today . . . but there is still a lot of pain going on inside people. Why I say that is because all the alcohol and the drugs, people don't know how to raise their children in respect to that they spoil them, you know. (AM1)*

In response to the question: “Are there other things that are important to know about *mishkauzee*?” the Elder shared the following:

*Our land or how the land speaks to us. The land is, ah, a very, ah, it doesn't communicate to us through language or anything like that, eh? But what it does communicate . . . its ability to provide, ah, families with the nourishment it needs. Like around harvesting food, and it's also around ceremony. And the land provides the place for where to do the ceremony. So it is, it speaks to us in that way. On how we use the land and how we relate to the land . . . and ceremony is a big part of it, yeah. Like doing the Pipe, and we hardly ever do the Sweats but we do a lot of Pipe ceremonies. When we had them [Sweat Lodges] it was a really nice thing to do. Everybody*

*participated including the very young and the very old. So it was a nice thing to do, it was a good thing to do. Because then it brought us in touch with the Spirit, eh? Because the Earth has a Spirit and we have a Spirit and we also have the invisible helpers, like the air and the sun and the water and the animals, they all have Spirits, and they come into our inner circle to help us see and help us understand the Earth and each other. The ceremony's a foundation of mishkauzee. That's what builds it up, yeah. (HE1)*

From these statements one hears a refrain of lament as well as a declaration of strength and determination. The ambivalence around the topic of language is important to note, as there is no generally accepted agreement on the importance of restoration of language as an aspect of cultural and personal healing. The family as a whole has not yet fully confronted what it means to be fractured in regards to language issues, what the significance really is regarding the loss of the language, and the need to restore their language as a core aspect of their restoration as a people.

Some of the younger people who have no Anishnaabemowin have expressed frustration when unable to understand what is being said, and the usual way of responding is for a translation to be provided, or for the speakers to begin talking only in English. There are no times during the reunions when stories in Anishnaabemowin are formally told, or language instruction is given through direct didactic teaching or in an immersion experience with a goal of some level of language acquisition. Yet there are those family members who show interest in doing these activities and express hope that they could occur.

The family as a whole has not settled into discussing or developing a strategy to address the language issue directly, has not prioritized the issue, and has not overtly linked regaining the language to strengthening the family/clan identity into the future. There has been no discussion of the need to restore language as part of the whole process of healing, which some would say is an essential and necessary part of restoration. Others would say it is too late to have full restoration of *Anishnaabemowin* in their lives since immersion programs are rare in their communities, and rarer still for those who live off-reserve. Language is still a sore spot, but, in the words of one elder,

*Resilience and cultural restoration manifests itself in spite of the loss of Anishnaabemowin . . . look at my kids—the resilience comes through in spite of not being connected to cultural traditions all the time . . . how she takes those kids to language class all the time, and he brings those people to the sweats, you know? I always go back to what my Elders told me. God created all those languages and it doesn't matter which one you use He always understands. (HE1)*

### 5.1.3 *Mishkauziwin*, spirituality, and healing

The participants in the research project all acknowledge in one way or another how their strength, their *mishkauziwin*, is affected by the things that have happened in their lives that needed healing. Spirituality is a large part of their healing, which in turn, is part of regaining the sense of identity that is so much a part of *mishkauziwin*. Participants' perceptions support findings by other researchers that resilience in Aboriginal contexts is closely related to the role of relationships and spirituality in the lives of individuals and communities (Gingras, 2009).



All of these issues are interwoven and cannot really be separated out and examined discretely, but must be viewed as an integral aspect of the whole picture. While spirituality, healing and *mishkauziwin* can be seen as different aspects in the whole picture of resilience, they cannot be understood without the reflection that incorporates all the aspects at the same time. Traditional teachings are a large part of this reflection, this examination, and for those family members who strongly identify with their cultural traditions, learning more and practicing more goes hand in hand with healing and spirituality, and is all a part of gaining *mishkauziwin*. For some of those who actively work at regaining cultural and spiritual traditions, that effort does not exclude them from continuing to practice a Catholic tradition they were given as children. Several family members participated in the St. Kateri canonization events at the Vatican in October 2012, an event that was a source of great pride for many in the family, as it was for many North American Native peoples.

The issues of trauma—both personal and collective (historical trauma)—need to be addressed when the topic of spirituality and healing are explored as avenues toward *mishkauziwin*. All members of this family have been deeply affected by the residential school experience from those who attended a residential school to those whose parents went to a residential school to those who have married into the family and had not previously known about the residential school experience. Only a few members of the family have been able to fully articulate their experiences of trauma in residential school and their subsequent healing process, but it is something which is spoken of openly in the Talking Circles, those who attended residential

school work to articulate some analysis of the larger social and political contexts surrounding their experiences there, and interpret understanding to other family members.

An additional topic that came up was the sense of trauma that has come from frustrations of living in a land where Anishnaabe peoples have no control over what happens to traditional territories that they are well aware belongs to their nation. There is a strong understanding that the Treaties signed in their regions did not imply a total surrender of the land or of rights to the land or resources, but were Peace and Friendship Treaties intended to have an outcome of sharing land, resources, and benefits in a spirit of mutuality. The powerful experiences of grief that ensue when a whole population is daily confronted with the profound losses, the powerlessness, the slowly grinding efforts to reclaim and restore what was taken unjustly, is debilitating at times and simply exhausting at other times. Confusion remains, and mystification as to how this could all happen, and there are difficulties to adequately put things into words yet still live, move on and have agency, hope, and determination. This is all part of the *mishkauziwin* that is being explored and acknowledged, as reflections return again and again to the questions around identity. One of the individual interviewees expressed the following:

*So, I don't know, like the strength of a family at our home, like, we got our strength from our parents and, umm . . . that was strength, like say if you had spirituality, that would have been a strength to carry on to your [life] And somehow after I was born, they [siblings] didn't receive their Indian names. I don't know why, but my dad was telling me . . . it was very, very important at the time way back that you received your*

*Indian name. 'Cause it was those names that were going to guide you through your life. Then I said to him, "Well, why did it stop?" and I guess that is when everything was changing like the Christianity came in strong with my parents. (AM1)*

Researcher: "Did they ever talk to you about that change?"

*No, we couldn't. It was later on after my husband and I started going to Sweat Lodges and trying to find out . . . going to different conferences and workshops that I remember, like, oh my god, you know! Geeze! What are we missing here? And I felt that, you know, I felt all that hurt and that pain because, like, we were growing up . . . in a white society rather than growing up in an Anishnaabe way of life. . . what happened to me in that Sweat Lodge, like when I go to church I pray the "Our Father" or whatever, but when I go into the Sweat Lodges, I was talking to the Creator from the heart . . . there was a big, huge impact, a difference in my life at the time . . . and it was at that time I started going to ceremonies . . .we tried many times, my husband and I tried to ask my dad, my parents, like, "Why? What happened to our way of life? Why did it happen?" And we tried to ask questions about the way it was way back—with the Sweat Lodges, the Ceremonies, and everything. And their lips were sealed. They were totally sealed. They would not tell us.(AM1)*

Researcher: "How do you understand that now?"

*Well, I understand very well . . . One of the questions I asked was "What was so wrong with our way of life? Why did Christianity come here? Why were we, you know, forced*

*to do something we didn't want to do?" I said, "The Creator gave us that, those teachings, those lodges, those ceremonies. That was the Creator, you know, the Creator gave us—why the heck have you got people to let us throw it away just like that?" I say that should never have been allowed! But I guess the fear in them—because even us, when we were growing up, I remember a lot of fear. Oh, I don't know! Just everything was fear to get us to do something. Yeah, so the strength and resilience—mishkauzee—that is a strong person—that is strong, to be powerful and strong. What makes us mishkauzee? That is what I think it is like, if we are going to be strong, we gotta know—as an Anishnaabe-kwe that I am, in order to be strong, I have to feel that I—I have to get rid of, ah, all of those resentments that I have in regards to us, you know, when the Europeans or somebody came and changed us. I have to get rid of those feelings. I feel—I have done quite a good job. I work on that already though . . . But still I get so upset.(AM1)*

Several of the individual interview participants spoke particularly eloquently about these matters, and excerpts of their statements follow:

*Myself, I was removed at a young age . . . scarred by that . . . by residential school. Closed doors for me going over there, no good thoughts or feeling about that experience. What I've had to overcome is how they tried to bind us with their ways, their rules . . . at age seven, eight, I watched those people, claiming Christian ways. I didn't see that, I saw the violence against the children . . . Being a proud Anishnaabe girl I never gave up that part of me but I couldn't walk that way. It was hard on us*

*when we came home . . . because of that whole situation I removed myself from my family . . . I traveled, searching for meaning . . . I talked to Elders, but when I came home it was sad . . . my Elders were here! I missed that. [At] age 25 I had “visitors,” traditional visions, Elders came to me . . . I went over to the white mist [and] a Grandfather was there with white hair and brown skin. I got scared . . . I went back into the trance—traveled—I went back to where the medicine person was . . . I heard beautiful laughter and then he started talking about big teachings—how our minds work! You open a door and if you go a different way, choose different ways . . . It was profound. I was grateful.(CN1)*

Another participant spoke specifically about losses the family had experienced over the years:

*Ya, they’ve all passed on. Now L and G this year[coughs] so we’re just—[pause] . . . I think it’s something [healing] that did happen, that just automatically started to happen. (DM1)*

She goes on to share some of her spiritual experiences as they relate to past healing that she connects with her strength:

*And the, ah, there’s a few powerful experiences I had with, as far as healing, ah, I was, I’m one of the ones that went to the residential schools and I had a lot of pain and went through a lot of pain and suffering while I was there. So when I started to heal a lot of those things came out and I didn’t know how to deal with it. So my brother gave me, ah, a tool to use with water, to help get the water spirits in to help heal and he said to sit a*

*glass of water by my bed every night, and, ah, offer tobacco for direction, do it for four nights. So, I did that, I think the first night wasn't really—anything didn't really happen, I just had a good sleep. And the second night . . . I woke up from [a] dream, woke up and I offered tobacco, and I gave thanks for them for coming to see me. And then I went back to sleep and I could honestly say that [in my dream] I could feel them [spirits] . . . and I knew! I knew what they were doing . . . they were taking out all that pain and suffering I was going through. And, ah, when I told them it was enough now then I woke up again . . . [and a relative] came the third night . . . He came to see me and he asked me if, ah, if I needed his help and I says, "Do I ever! I really need you . . . When I woke up I honestly could say that the smell of the sage was there . . . then the fourth night, nothing didn't really happen until I woke up. . . I could see . . . [spirits] praying over me. And I shut my eyes and I opened them again, they were gone. So I offered my tobacco again and gave thanks for them coming and I drank my water . . . that was one of the experiences, one of the ceremonies I did on myself—for myself . . . and I found it very powerful and it gave me a lot of strength. You know as part of getting strong . . . I just had to share that with everybody in Talking Circles after, of what I did. (DM1)*

The clarity of her active exercise of agency in seeking, requesting and receiving help is paired with her immersion in a transformative spiritual experience where past, present and the ethereal are fused into one transcendent series of dreams where she interacts with her traditional ceremonial medicines, her helper spirits, and her family. When she emerges with a

declaration of ownership of her healing, it leads her full circle from pain to open sharing with her community in traditional forms of Talking Circles. She develops a solid identity of a strong person whose relationships with spirit, family and her own suffering have melded into active, forward focus in a continuing process of *getting strong*. This is a perspective of resilience arising from multiple locations within an individual and a family.

A participant in the research who has done extensive research on the family history talked about a pervasive sense of abandonment she experienced, which was alleviated with a discovery of a letter that she found in the Hudson Bay Archives:

*With family being so important to me, when I was doing my research, and I saw that J had left his family here and went back to Scotland—even though it's seven generations ago—I felt hurt! Even like a little sense of abandonment . . . but, in the letters, it is so obvious that [he] loved his son, but also—he talks about, or asks about C's wife and C's children. So he obviously cares about them, so by reading those letters I was able to put closure to that feeling . . . it was something, for sure, to, ah, to see those letters.*

(CO1)

She went on to discuss how she began to understand the strength in the family as extending back to grandparent's generations and beyond, and how the hurt that she felt regarding abandonment issues was healed a bit by discovering the letters in the Hudson Bay Archives, and discovering the love of an ancestor for his offspring, even from a distance. In this way we

see that time and relationships<sup>28</sup> extend through the generations and contribute a perspective of resilience today to the family strength.

## 5.2 Synthesis and critical analysis: results and previous research on resilience

Embarking on a relationship of study with the Anishnaabe family participating in the study of their *mishkauziwin* allowed the study participants and me, as the primary researcher, to travel together in a way which we hoped would lead us to deeper understandings of resilience in general and their resilience in particular. The Anishnaabemowin word *mishkauziwin* is the closest word that can convey their understandings of resilience—strength. It required many people with various types of strength, working together, to weave all the threads of meaning into a coherent story.

The preceding paragraphs show family members' perceptions of their *mishkauziwin*, expressed in various ways as it manifests in their lives. For the members of this particular Anishnaabe family the term “resilience” means strength—strong relationships and family love; a restoration of a strong cultural identity; renewal of traditional clan knowledge and strength; and strength in healing and spirituality. All of these things are seen as interconnected, part of a whole, part of their identity, which makes them who they are, and from which all members of the family can derive a sense of strength.

How does this relate to mainstream concepts of resilience? In this context subtle shades of difference exist in emphasis, yet at the same time there are commonalities in factors

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<sup>28</sup>The traditional teachings of the Medicine Wheel include many teachings on time and relationships. Medicine Wheel teachings are often shared or mentioned, formally or informally, at a family reunion by an Elder.



customarily examined in mainstream studies on resilience. These final sections of the chapter look at how *mishkauziwin* relates to factors elaborated on in earlier chapters: risk and protective factors and their importance in human studies on resilience, issues of survival and adaptation, and how the concepts of strength and resilience can be considered to be related.

### 5.2.1 Relationship of *mishkauziwin* to risk and protective factors

As family members explored the topic of *mishkauziwin*, the focus was on how they understood their strength more than on the difficulties they had had to overcome. While significant difficulties were mentioned, such as residential school experiences, racism, social and educational disadvantages, and histories including trauma, those matters were a backdrop to the main actor on the stage—their *mishkauziwin*. None of the participants expressed feeling that because of the difficulties in their lives they had been at risk of losing their strength.

Rather, it was their *mishkauziwin* that sustained them and was the focus of their intentions to keep the family reunions and the clan revitalization going. It was their identity as part of this family/clan that provided the protective factors modulating the effects of loss and trauma, shaping the risk effects impacting their lives, and moving adaptation actions forward toward a viable future (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000, p. 858).

The family/clan reunion events are one example of adaptation in a positive direction, and it involves the active participation of over 150 individuals organized around sustained efforts over a long time period and encompassing relationships that extend over a large geographical region. The organizational spirit of the clan concepts, the clan identity, which includes shadowy knowledge from the past vitality of the clan structure of the Anishnaabe peoples

extending into historical times, is one of the protective factors at work in this family/clan revitalization and in their sense of *mishkauziwin*.

This phenomenon is compatible with research findings in Aboriginal contexts. In the second chapter of this dissertation I reviewed the current body of knowledge on resilience in First Nations contexts which demonstrated how the strength of identity and cultural identification contributed to protective measures, alleviated risk factors, and improved outcome measures considered to be indicators of resilience. Many of the participants in this study related moving personal examples of ways by which their own lives, and their relationships with family members, had benefitted directly from the strength that came from identifications with family/clan, and traditional cultural revitalization. The strength in family connections is a powerful factor in participants' perceptions, as evidenced by the following comments:

*I see how that strength is being carried out by our past experiences and the way we carried on as family as members of the [Clan Spirit name] Clan. (DN1)*

*So, and I guess that on my own, it would be personal growth, or my own development is where I reflect on the clan and how it plays in who I am, [and] what my purpose is. (MNG1)*

*From my perspective I suppose the mishkauzee is a something always within us, but, ah, through life as we travel I guess going places here and there, you, ah, have obstacles like, like anything . . . many different cultures of people go through those*

*obstacles and it's like within you and . . . when you're at a low or something you're, in your life it goes back to you. (KN1)*

*Well, part of it is what I just talked about, a lot of discrimination, racism, and a lot of the things that happened . . . you have to take it. Sometimes I don't. It doesn't matter who you are, if you have to take your place—fight for your place—be resilient and keep going after what you want . . . but I know there is a clan system that demonstrates what family you belong to and all that . . . to help order people in the community, but I just—listening to my elders and whatever, my parents, and grandfather.(JO1)*

### 5.2.2 Relationship of *mishkauziwin* to survival and adaptation

The ways by which the family sustains itself, and the connections the family/clan has to its *Dodem*,<sup>29</sup> is expressed by one of the participants in the following quote:

*My father . . . he said that the clan basically teaches its member to, ah, live in harmony with each other, and with the earth . . . [our Dodem] teaches the clan different values, how to harvest food for themselves, how to be, ah, close to your siblings, how to be close to the earth and how to nourish your own survival instincts. So survival then becomes part of *mishkauzee*. (HE1)*

Survival as a theme in this research project was evident. Even in jokes, the phrase, “*We're still here!*” was a refrain, or a *leitmotif*,<sup>30</sup> by which more is said than what is spoken. In Chapter

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<sup>29</sup>Not named for confidentiality purposes.

Two, I wrote about historical trauma, survival, and resilience, and how these topics are not always directly addressed in studies on resilience in the mainstream literature, but need to be addressed in some fashion in studies involving indigenous peoples (Wesley-Esquimaux & Snowball, 2010). When the impacts of wars, famines, and plagues are taken into account, one can see that on an international scale most human population groups have experienced massive trauma, often repeated in every generation over long periods of time with little opportunity to recover before the next wave of trauma hits.

Wesley-Esquimaux (2004) believes evidence indicates through the historical record that European societies devastated by the plague required several generations between the waves of epidemics for recovery, and writes, “once traumatic events stop for a sufficient length of time (at least 40 years) socio-cultural reconstruction and healing (can) will begin” (p. 26). Only in the past 40–50 years have Canada’s Aboriginal peoples had the time and opportunity to begin their recovery and reclaim strength following the devastation of European contact:

It was the horrific impact of those 400 years that planted an endemic sense of loss and grief into the psyche of Indigenous people across the continent and left an entire population grappling with a form of complex post-traumatic stress disorder that is only now beginning to be acknowledged. In Canada and the United States, the residential school experience, following right on the heels of four hundred years of epidemics, further served to ensure a sense of hopelessness and defeat. (p. 24)

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<sup>30</sup>Implying an underlying thematic concept or expression; having an isomorphic pattern

The family/clan revitalization project is solidly situated in this process of survival, recovery, and adaptation, and family members are conscious of their strength in having survived. The family reunions are an example of the powerful reclamation occurring from the ground up, in contrast to the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which structures events from more of a top-down approach. Change occurring from within the location of people's lives tends to be more resilient than change which is driven by external means and structures. Healing is the "inside job" that works best in families and communities, although ceremonies and enactments of the process serve as significant anchoring events in a national collective memory, assisting in extending the healing process into the future through commemorative public acts.

The following excerpt places the concept of *mishkauziwin* in the discussion of survival:

*Well, mishkauzee basically is, ah, like nature itself . . . and mishkauzee . . . over time that brings you the strength that you need to survive and that's what the [Dodem] teaches its young and it teaches, ah, the clan is to be strong so you could survive and do what you need to do in your community to keep it strong. (HE1)*

He goes on to share what his father said to him:

*Well, he said that the way, the reason, he followed the [Dodem] is because [it] will not make mistakes. . . . Other institutions that are set up and designed to teach you morality lessons, the difference between right and wrong, [the Dodem] has particular instruction he follows from the Creator to take care of his young. And, he will not*

*deviate from those instructions. So he will never diverge into self-indulgence and those kinds of things, and perverse relationships with your young or anything like that . . . so my father says, “Never follow a church or a pastor or a priest, because he’ll make mistakes, but follow that [Dodem] and he’ll never make a mistake.” So that’s where my strength comes from. (HE1)*

The above statement is in keeping with Gone’s (2009a) findings in his study of the approach at a Native American healing lodge. The study demonstrated positive outcomes for clients whose treatment was grounded in community-based cultural strategies for healing traumatized peoples. For the family/clan revitalization process, the family members are consciously investing in a process intended to bring strength to their survival as a part of a distinct people who followed the [Dodem]. The cultural components of the family contribute to their strength, which they see as part of their survival as Anishnaabe people. *Mishkauziwin* is more than individual functioning and accomplishments—it is part of the family/clan identity, and while not all participants may express a sense of knowing a lot about their clan identity, it is a sign, or signifier, of their identity as a family, and of their survival. For some family members, it is the unique characteristics of the animal [Dodem], which define for them the very nature of their adaptiveness, and is explanatory of why they do what they do, or why their family is as it is.

### 5.2.3 Relationship of *mishkauziwin* to resilience

The question considered is: does the term *mishkauziwin* mean resilience? Are the concepts essentially the same although coming from different traditions? *Mishkauziwin* means strength

in translation into English, with the English word having no implication of being a process, but being a characteristic, aspect or quality of something. In the study, participants seemed to have an understanding that *mishkauziwin* was more than a characteristic, aspect or quality, but was also a process that was ongoing with an implication that it was related to other concepts.

*Mishkauziwin* was seen to be an aspect of identity, and was understood to be related to healing and spirituality. There is believed to be a relationship between the experience of having *mishkauziwin* and being in a relationship with a clan, or the animal *Dodem* of the family clan. Having *mishkauziwin* is more than having an individual quality or personality characteristic. *Mishkauziwin* comes from somewhere—from within the family, within the person, as well as from external sources such as love, or clan, or ancestors, or healing experiences. Having *mishkauziwin* helps one to be *mishkauzee*—a strong person—but one's own, or one's family, *mishkauziwin* is something that is present even in the absence of being "*mishkauzee*." It is simply there.

In Chapter Two, the word resilience was used to indicate a process, not a characteristic. Resilience in human studies is explored in various ways, often in instrumental ways with an eye toward increasing protective factors and reducing risk factors. For the family participating in this study it seems that their *mishkauziwin* is what it is, has always been there as part of the way their family lives and relates within the family and in relationship with the external world. *Mishkauziwin* is part of identity and the question of whether or not one has it is not something they examined formally until embarking on this study. Even that effort was focused more on understanding what it was, where it came from, and what it meant, than to try to discover if

they had it. The process of their relationships and their efforts to revitalize their family/clan identity over the years was an outgrowth of a process of *mishkauziwin* at work, linked with relationships extending into the past, and forward focused in thinking about the next generations. For many of the family members the exploration around the topic of resilience was a new way to look at what they were doing through the process of the reunion experiences, and was an opportunity to look at the process of their healing journey and their identity restoration more than to define an abstract concept of resilience.

The processes of resilience are as multiple and varied as are the human beings who live their lives in either supportive or restrictive environments. People will engage in action toward the future, toward creativity and life-affirming interactions and behaviors even in contexts of oppression. The business of survival allows little opportunity for intellectual examination of whether or not one is resilient, or has risk factors impairing adaptation, or supportive factors promoting positive development. Cultural values that are persistent throughout deep time and historical trauma can be said to be resilient, but that is because the process of the *leitmotif* is embedded in relationships and metaphors sustained over time. Rituals and ceremonies, which perpetuate the metaphors, can sustain identity for many millennia through multiple changes.<sup>31</sup> For this family, the family/clan revitalization process embodies the processes of resilience in the sense that reinforcing traditional family and Anishnaabe values is an avenue by which family members experience and exercise *mishkauziwin*, which is an aspect of their identity—who they are.

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<sup>31</sup> As an example, one has only to study the history of Israel and the Jewish people to understand this.



The two words, *mishkauziwin* and resilience, cannot be said to be synonymous, but it does seem to be evident that the meanings of the words are used interchangeably by the study participants, with the word *mishkauziwin* implying something more than resilience. To “have *mishkauziwin*” is to “have resilience” and/or to “be *mishkauzee*”—it is identification as much as process.

#### 5.2.4 *Mishkauziwin* and the future

When we think about the strength, or what could be called the resilience, of the family participants of this study, it is evident that the perceptions and dreams of the family members are represented in the common ideas they all share to one extent or another about who they are and their mutual purpose as a family. It is the range of things they believe in, the memories they share, the stories they continue to pass on, and most of all the things that they do together and how those things are done, that reflect their identity as a family of indestructible strength—*mishkauziwin*. Despite all that the family has survived through the generations, there remains a sense of the family as unique and strong, with a distinct and enduring identity and purpose, and a clan role in the Anishnaabe Nation. They are who they are because they choose to be and because who they are is a gift of the Creator. Because they were born into the Anishnaabe they have continued to reinforce their identity even in generations where the forces of assimilation were most harsh.

The question remains: can the family identity and *mishkauziwin* extend into the future? Will the generations to come have the ability to restore the traditional culture of their ancestors? Will their land base be preserved? Will their descendants continue to gather together and

celebrate their roots and identity through future reunion events? Will stories still be told of the times in remote history of living in the bush and living well through trapping and hunting, gathering and fishing, building self-sufficient communities that nurture equality and Anishnaabe values and traditions? What will transformation in the future look like, and how will the *mishkauziwin* of the clan be continued? Will the spiritual strength of the ancestors from time immemorial extend into the timeless future?

Of course, these are not questions that a study of this sort could ever answer. Asking these questions is simply to bring into words some of the feelings and desires expressed by family members who search for greater knowledge of what *mishkauziwin* means. Does it mean resilience in the sense of returning to a former state of existence? Or does it mean a fluid and organic process of emergent transformation as the family grows throughout the generations to come, a networked process that is an intrinsic aspect of an infinite web of relationships? For family participants in the study it was more important to engage in a relationship of study together and experience the process of learning more about themselves, than it was to answer any particular question(s). Gaining knowledge together about who they are and what they have was the key.

The role of education in this gaining of knowledge is integral. Of the nine individuals who consented to be interviewed, all had completed their grade 12 or equivalent, five had completed, or were near completing, a college or university degree and of those five, two had completed a degree at the master's level. All nine individuals participated in various ways in continuing education, certificate programs, or in-service trainings on the job in the areas of

law, education, management and business, and were deeply interested in education and knowledge. Of the nine who were interviewed, eight were parents who encouraged and supported their children in getting a good education. It was expected that their children would get a good education, yet completing or not completing a degree was not seen as an end point, but the underlying philosophy seemed to be that anyone could go back to school at any time for any reason. All nine had some, to a great deal of, understanding of traditional knowledges with a few having had experience training at various levels in traditional forms of healing or medicine. One of the nine had made a significant contribution to collecting a family genealogy, and another had published a book.

Combined with the emphasis made on education by several participants of the Talking Circles, it is clear that members of this family support and engage in knowledge work, and that obtaining a good education is normalized and accessible. In light of this, the role of education as a factor in the family's resilience processes must be noted. This would indicate that education is a protective factor—a form of activation for resilience processes. This is a significant finding meriting further investigation, particularly in light of the limited resources dedicated to education for Native peoples in Canada at secondary and post-secondary level, as well as for schools on reserves.

### 5.3 Summary

In the relationship of study, the participants and I learned to trust in our learning journey and to recognize the changes I needed to make that would open up my heart and abilities to engage responsibly and personally in the journey together. I was able to do my part in engaging with

and analyzing the information as it emerged from the interactions with the participants. The themes, patterns and metaphors immersed me in an encounter with the topic of resilience from a First Nations' viewpoint in ways that served to clarify matters for all of us in the relationship of study. Our significant findings about the family/clan perception of *mishkauziwin* emphasize the process of restoration of family/clan identity, and the various processes of resilience, beyond simply the content of what was shared and discussed. The work together reaffirmed the value of a knowledge study emerging from the ground up as contrasted with other top down approaches.

The desire for stronger connections as a family/clan generated their efforts to revitalize their life together. Some of the work that is part of the revitalization can be seen as a grieving process moving towards transformation of identity. We were able to clarify together that their perception of *mishkauziwin* means healing and strength in many dimensions. Clan identity is deeply embedded in these perceptions. Although clan no longer functions as part of an organizing network for Anishnaabe peoples, the goal of some leaders is to restore the clan system in a contemporary meaningful way (Anishnabek Nation, 2012). The family/clan participating in this research project is clearly intentional about restoring their own clan identity, which is seen as an aspect of the strength passed on to them. Family members see this manifesting in their relationships with each other and with the larger world around them, and attempt to pass on teachings regarding this process to younger family members. *Mishkauziwin* is evident in the connections within and between families, in aspects of spirituality, clan roles, cultural traditions, survival, and love, and is at the heart of the family/clan revitalization.

*Mishkauziwin* is seen to be the enduring process that has facilitated family survival and the persistence of their identity despite the losses they have endured. Themes of restoring lost identity through connections to land, language, and traditional culture are evident. It is their *mishkauziwin* that has provided the strength for healing and is the impetus for forward movement despite the effects of historical trauma, colonization, and assimilation. It is part of the spiritual strength facilitating healing for individuals and families in the clan.

This relationship of study has shown that family/clan revitalization is part of protective factors operating against the backdrop of significant risk factors for family members, and confirms what has been shown in other research on resilience in Aboriginal contexts. The perception of the research participants of their *mishkauziwin* show that it is their identity as part of the family/clan which assisted in modulating effects of loss and trauma. This identity is seen as something that “comes from within”—it is who they are.

## Chapter 6

### 6 Discussion: “We’ve never been broken”

The discussion weaves the findings together in a narrative that encapsulates the family/clan story as it emerged in the process of the “ceremony of research.” The strength of the family as the participants perceive it is situated as their understanding of resilience. The responsibilities of resilience research in indigenous contexts are discussed with recommendations for future research. The ecological context of responsibilities to family, clan, and nation is discussed in light of family/clan efforts to sustain investment in an ongoing family revitalization process, seen as unfolding in a continuous line since time immemorial. The conclusion is their own: “We have never been broken.”

#### 6.1 A First Nation model of resilience as *mishkauziwin*

In 2007, when I first began thinking about this project, I embarked on a personal process of building relationships with the family members who were interested in the idea of gaining a greater understanding of their strength—their resilience. I was just beginning the difficult task of trying to learn some of the dialect spoken by the family (an Oji-Cree dialect), and asked, “What is the word for resilience?” The ensuing discussions eventually brought us to understand the word, *mishkauzee* (*mishkauziwin*), as the word the family wanted to use. I have learned in our work together the depth and extent to which family members consider the concept of strength to be a defining aspect of identity—of who they are. We can say that the perception for this family of *mishkauziwin* as a term for resilience means to be strong (*mishkauziwin*) and

to be that strong person (*mishkauzee*). For this family the concept of resilience does not contain the understanding of rebounding or returning to a prior state of functioning. Their conceptualization, rather, is that of having endured, remained, and continued—of never having lost their core strength no matter what the disruptions. For this family it is a simple concept, not complicated or complex. One of the participants stated it this way: “*We’ve never been broken*” (HE1).

### 6.1.1 *Mishkauziwin* and identity: The ceremony of family/clan continuity

A family with a sense of having endured, with roots extending back into time immemorial in an unbroken line, embodies the meaning of *mishkauziwin* as a construct for resilience. The intersecting relationships within and beyond this family circle become a network, which nourishes the bonds that are continually being constructed and reconstructed, and serve to strengthen identity further. Controversies over whether or not this *mishkauziwin* is representative of resilience or some other phenomenon (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000) are not something of much concern to the family. What they are focused on is what they understand—their strength—which endures, defines, and inspires.

Individuals in the family can all identify ways in which they have experienced wounds of many sorts, and ways by which they break through denial and heal from those wounds or live on in spite of the wounds. There is an enduring sense that they are part of something strong anchoring them in an identity that allows them to be a person of strength in whatever

circumstance. A quote from Garnett Angecone<sup>32</sup> describes this well: “It’s amazing how strong we can be when we act out of love and respect and know that we are a part of something much larger than ourselves” (Angecone & Akiwenzie-Damm, 2008, p. 311).

Being part of this family is being part of something much larger than themselves, and family members identify with this as an aspect of their own *mishkauziwin*. This is the foundation of the resilience of the family as a whole and as individual members of the family—the enduring identity of a member of this family/clan. The reunions have served to revitalize connections, strengthen identity, and restore the extension of the clan into the future through relationships. The reunions are the conveyance moving the family forward, and where their strong identity is nurtured. Reunions represent the network of relationships that bind them together in a purpose greater than themselves. The family/clan identity is one they are learning about as they reconstruct stories, memories, and identity. At the reunions people talk about their *mishkauziwin*, about the stories that tell them who they are, and about the future. This is the event where love of the family is strengthened in tangible action marked by good times, good food, traditional ceremonies, gifts, laughter, singing, drumming, playing, and catching up with family news. All of these aspects serve to anchor the strength in spoken and unspoken ways.

I believe it is no accident that the family reunions I was invited to were held in an area beside a body of water—a river or lake. The family/clan is organized around their identification with their *Dodem*, which is associated with water. Water is seen as Medicine, as sacred, as a teacher,

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<sup>32</sup>The late Cree leader in the Residential School Truth and Reconciliation movement.



and as a source of healing, food and nurturance. There is so much that is part of the relationship with water and the *Dodem* which cannot be written about here, but it is important to acknowledge the role these play in the continuity of identity for the family/clan. Early on I envisioned the body of water as a method of conveyance into shared territory around a sacred fire, and as the years progressed through the relationship of study with this family/clan, I found these images in my mind to be reflected in the life around me as we learned together something about *mishkauziwin*. Water has become a powerful metaphor for me as I have attempted to understand what their strength means, how it manifests, and how it is realized in the lives of the members of this family/clan system.

In 2010 I received a teaching about water from an Elder with whom I was working at the time. He said, “There are four kinds of water and we need to give thanks to all of them and think about them. There is the Mother Water of the womb that we all come from, and the Thunderbird Water in the sky that comes when we see the rain clouds. There is the Spring Water that comes from Mother Earth and it is very sacred. And then there are the waters of our tears and we need to respect them. They bring healing.” At each of the family reunions that I attended I heard stories about the water, and things were shared with me in the interviews about how the water and the *Dodem* had touched that individual in very personal and spiritual ways. I heard more about the teachings of the Thunderbird, the mythical “Grandfather” who sits in the West, and the sacred Mother Water. I hear teachings about them whenever I attend a Sweat Lodge Ceremony. The reflection that these teachings inspire for me serves to deepen my understandings of the eternal aspects of this relationship of study. I have learned something

about myself, about resilience and strength, and about this family, which opened its heart to me and helped me in my research journey.

I have come to understand something about the ceremony of family/clan continuity. The reunions can be conceptualized as a ritual enacted in ways that bring the family/clan together in what can be considered a ceremony, which in turn brings them to the stories and metaphors that allow them to transcend, to move to a higher level of consciousness about their lives, no matter what may be the problems swirling around them. This orientation provides whatever there is of substance for individuals in the family to make choices about their identity. The process can move individuals to the heart of identification as a member of the family/clan, or remain on the periphery and move back and forth on a continuum that flows in circular fashion to include members in various ways. At whatever location one finds oneself, there remains a clear identification: “I am a part of that which is.” The family/clan is structured in an open fashion, which allows for concentric circles of membership or affiliations, including distant relatives, in-laws, close friends, and “adopted” members. Appearances of fractured identity do not remain static, but flow through a variety of resolutions over the years. The fluidity is like water itself, powerful yet soft, touching everything as it moves, and in its movement pushing even the heaviest objects forward or out of the way.

In *Rethinking Resilience from Indigenous Perspectives* (Kirmayer, Dandeneau, Marshall, Phillips, & Williamson, 2011), the authors write:

In biological systems, resilience usually does not involve simply springing back to a previous state but is a dynamic process of adjustment, adaptation, and transformation in response to challenges and demands. In adapting, the organism also usually changes its own environment. (p.85)

One aspect of the family/clan identity is the characteristics of the *Dodem* and the dynamic element of water associated with that figure. The identification and relationship the family has with the *Dodem* is an adaptive tool that serves to move the family forward even as they and their environment change. There are strong qualities of moving blockages out of their way as they work to reclaim their identity, quietly yet forcefully, like the work of the element, water. The constant adjustments and accommodations that are made promote transformations that serve to strengthen everyone in the family, even those members who live remotely from the traditional territories that define the heart of the family/clan identity. Kirmayer et al., (2011) continue:

What is needed then are alternative frameworks that take into account the dynamic processes on many levels that may confer on the individual, communities, and whole people better prospects for survival and positive development. Indigenous concepts provide ways to approach a dynamic, systemic, ecological view of resilience. (p.85)

If *mishkauziwin* can be the word equivalent to resilience in Anishnaabe contexts, then it seems appropriate that in general, studies on resilience pertaining to Anishnaabe peoples should give consideration to clan identification processes. Without an understanding of the role of the clan

and the *Dodem* there will be an incomplete understanding of the risk and protective factors, and interactive dynamic factors of adaptive processes. Directions as to how to move forward in promoting positive development will be lacking.

For indigenous peoples without clan systems, it will be important to identify the traditional components of their identity that anchor them as a distinct people, and focus on the proximity of identification with whatever that may be. This is, I believe, a fundamental aspect which is needed when examining resilience in First Nations contexts.

Looking at aspects of traditional identity structures should be part of determining how and to what extent the social determinants of health in other areas have impacted on the *mishkauziwin*, or resilience, of the individual, family, or community that is the focus of question. Such a focus keeps the work situated in a strength-based position, which is empowering not only for individuals, but also for families and communities, and sheds light on the processes at work in culturally safe ways. Kirmayer et al. (2011), referring to social determinants of health, write, “These are not discrete or independent factors but interact in ways that reflect historical processes of colonization, marginalization, and oppression that have resulted in particular patterns of persistent inequity” (p.85). I would add that for this study, these are also the very obstacles, like the rocks in the water, which are moved aside through the force of the spirit of the traditional identifications motivating the family in its restoration efforts.

While much has been changed, lost or destroyed, there is much that remains, is persistent, endures, and transforms. The family is adaptive and always has been. They have never been

broken as a family, even during the years when many members lost touch with each other. The stories have endured about how family members helped each other or fed each other, and the determination to restore relationships has strengthened. As one family member put it, “*The strength of our family comes from pure, genuine, sincere love!*” (CO1) The family/clan continuity and identity is an integral aspect of their *mishkauziwin*, which cannot be separated out from any other aspect of risk or protective factor that may be examined. The manifestation of *mishkauziwin* is experienced as love, and the reunions are what carry that love forward—“*the gift of us coming together*” (KO1). The connections between relationships, love and identity have a powerful role in maintaining the family network.

### 6.1.2 *Mishkauziwin* and community: An ecological perspective

The International Collaborative Indigenous Health Research Partnership (ICIHRP) *Roots of Resilience Research Project*, researched factors that promote resilience in mental health among indigenous people (Kirmayer, Whitley, Dandeneau, & Isaac, 2009). Ten Aboriginal communities in Canada participated in the project, with results in videos, publications and resources on what is distinctive about resilience in Aboriginal communities, and the social and cultural aspects of life that factor into researching resilience in those communities. Reviewing the resources from the project highlights the importance of *mishkauziwin* in community life when looking at resilience in Aboriginal contexts. The strength of a community is central to understanding what is happening at the individual and family level when issues of resilience are under consideration. The reverse is also true: *mishkauziwin* of families and individuals are

central to understanding community resilience. In this ecological perspective the approaches cannot be “either-or” but need to be “both-and.”

Community itself is a concept meaning different things to different people, just as there are variant understandings and perspectives of resilience. I learned, in the process of engaging in this relationship of study, that community is more than a static place situated in specific time. I learned that relatives past and future were part of what was present, and that time was fluid with the power to bring the past into the here-and-now, which is composed of physical and spiritual reality. Indeed, at every feast held at the family reunions, the presence of the ancestors was acknowledged, along with the relationships with the plant nation, the animal nation, the air, water, fire and land. While I did not understand all of the words in the Anishnaabemowin prayers, I understood enough to know when the very personal address was directed to which nation, or cardinal direction. I learned that life is lived in a global sense where history and unseen helpers are as immediate as the breath within a person. I learned that our own tangible realities are created through the beliefs and relationships with Spirit that bring those realities into being. This was a different perspective from which to think about *mishkauziwin*. Where did this come from? It was vaguely familiar to me, but in a way that continually slipped out of my ability to articulate what I was experiencing.

As I grappled with this I came to understand that in order to really get to know the *mishkauziwin* of this family, I was going to have to face the *mishkauziwin* in myself and understand where that came from. What were the experiences in my own background, my own community of origin, which led me to this endeavor? What was the historical trauma I

experienced that resonated with the stories I was hearing regarding loss of land, loss of language, oppression and disenfranchisement? How did it happen that my experience of community had brought me into this different experience of community, and how did the ecology of my life segue into the ecology of the life of this family, which so graciously and generously shared with me and taught me, and accorded me a place of affection and benevolence? My own ecology intersected with the ecology of this family to some extent, and especially so when we discovered indirect common ancestry from a location on the European continent. I could feel the tears in my own heart as I observed the tears in others' eyes as they talked about the grief of no longer being fluent in their own language. I could feel the frustration in myself that resonated with the frustration of others who had no access to knowing the ancient songs and stories of a culture lost and destroyed because I knew that inaccessibility through my own experiences in life. Very slowly and obliquely I began to share bits and pieces of my thinking about these matters, and my eyes were opened further. This was part of the ecology of the community we were becoming together by engaging in a relationship of study as we talked about resilience and *mishkauziwin*.

Strength, like resilience, is not just a thing to have or do, it is not a simple characteristic, and it is not an exact copy of what was "before." It is a process composed of many different things, and it exists in relational processes and intricate networks. Having *mishkauziwin* means to move forward on a journey that includes the past and does not cut off from it even when it was painful. It is integrative, encompassing, dynamic, and alive. I learned this about psychosocial healing in my counseling work as a clinical social worker, but I don't believe I integrated it

into my understanding of resilience until I engaged with this journey of a study of resilience with this family. In order to truly view resilience in a systematic fashion I had to grapple with the process itself, beyond the content.

The journey of resilience is a holistic process involving the total integration of all aspects of the environment receiving a damaging impact and springing back into its former state of function, or semblance of function, not necessarily the former or original structure. It may not look identical to the way it looked before—parts may be permanently missing, scars may be left—but whatever it is that is being examined and observed, whether forest or family, is once again functioning in a unified fashion and fulfilling its purposes in spite of the past damage. Healing of some sort can be both seen and experienced.

I see that process as I drive north toward my home when I pass large sections of forest that were burned many years ago. The forest of tall trees is gone and only the remnants remain—columns of charred wood standing in a carpet of low green bush. Looking closely, I see a vibrant expanse of little pines and tamaracks, birches and poplars, spruces, cedars, willows and blueberries and others, all growing vigorously. These plants were present before the fire and now they have burst from buried seeds to cover the damage with only scarred remains evident. The fire did not poison the soil.

When I think of the family I am working with, this is an appropriate metaphor. The fire of colonization has not poisoned the soul of this family, although from within their own truth, the “soil” of the old Anishnaabe life-ways has been poisoned and permanently destroyed. Family



members may disagree with one another over various things (such as whether or not to make a strong attempt to restore their language abilities, or if traditional ceremonies are or are not compatible with Christian beliefs, etc.) but they continue to recognize their fundamental identity, which is flexible enough to contain a variety of “voices.” The family has tall, strong elders standing out, very visible—elders to whom one is easily drawn because of the depth of personality evident in their faces and speech. They aren’t perfect—they are crusty people in some ways, like the blackened Jack Pine tree trunks no longer producing leaves, *and* they still have their stories and memories that when shared reveal wisdom, patience, understanding, and fortitude. The family is inspiring in simple, basic ways, from elders to the youngest baby carried in a traditional *tiknaagan*. It has survived the impact of the Fur Trade and still carries the stories of grandfathers and grandmothers from that era. It has survived the imprisonment of the reserve system and “Indian Agents.” It has survived the destruction of the Clan system, the termination of rights to territory, the removals, the taking of children generation after generation into the residential schools. There are still stories in the family of the children who never returned and those lost relatives are remembered and honored—they are still present. The family has spent the past 25 years, in various ways, coming back together, learning to know their intimate connections to each other’s stories, sharing fun times of growth and feasting, sharing sorrow, failures, and loss, and still finding humor and joy and pleasure in gathering together. There is still a long way to go, and family members know that, and talk about how they can help their youngest members, and the generations still to come.

I have heard stories of past gatherings that happened during the fur trade era when the family clan would travel up the river in large canoes to visit relatives they hadn't seen for a time, to share meat and berries, and trade things like snowshoes and birch bark canoes. Many of the family members no longer can speak or understand their language, but all honor the language speakers among them and listen to the words spoken and try to practice what they know. A few younger ones have made it a priority to relearn their language fluently, go to language conferences, and join Facebook conversations in the language. The language is always a part of the family gatherings, as are sacred ceremonies thousands of years old. At reunions traditional feast foods of fish, or moose, blueberries and wild rice, are always present in some fashion. Stories of the best places to pick blueberries are shared, and discussions about whether or not "this is going to be a good year for blueberry picking" abound. The children are instructed on how to behave around the elders and around the feast food and the "give-away" blanket at the end of the reunion. These things are a part of an ecology that has nurtured the web of culture, generation after generation and it continues today.

One way to conceptualize what I am trying to articulate here is to use language from the mainstream. We are talking about social capital, ecological and systemic resilience and resistance, and all the social networks (animate and inanimate) that sustain the family identity. "Social capital can be defined as the degree to which a community's resources (physical, symbolic, financial, human, or natural) are reinvested in social relations" (Kirmayer et al., 2009, p.73). There is a link between the family's perceptions of their *mishkauziwin* and the

social capital that is part of their resilience. The family exemplifies what other researchers have found to be true about Aboriginal communities and families when looking at resilience:

Resilience is a way to address the fact that despite historical and ongoing conditions of hardship, many Aboriginal cultures and communities have survived and even flourished. Conditions of adversity and risk have driven both individual and collective responses of healing, recovery and growth. As a result, many Aboriginal communities, families and individuals enjoy high levels of well-being and success in both local and mainstream settings. The resilience framework focuses attention on these positive outcomes. (p. 100)

Even with all the work over the past several decades that has been done to look at resilience in Aboriginal communities it is still an elusive concept. The linear scientific models of most disciplines do not blend well with looking at things from the holistic perspective within the framework of Aboriginal viewpoints. Incorporating the significance of the spirituality aspect in the ecological framework is especially challenging. “It would be difficult for a linear epidemiological model based on risk and protection factors to capture this reality” (Tousignant & Sioui, 2009, p.46).

### 6.1.3 *Mishkauziwin* and responsibility: Family/clan role in the Anishnaabe Nation

I am beginning to grasp a way to express the *mishkauziwin* of this family. It is still here! Family members are talking together to learn what are the roles and expectations of the clan, and what it is about their clan that makes them who they are and how they carry themselves in

the world they live in. This identity helps them to know who they are as individuals *and* as a collective, and how they take on responsibilities and carry the family forward. It helps them to know who they are in the Anishnaabe Nation. They are proud of family members who are teachers, doctors, lawyers, nurses, line cutters, firefighters and forestry workers, miners, child care workers, social workers, chiefs and band council members—these are the family members who publicly express one of the major roles of the clan which is to take care of the people and the land. Family members are appreciated who have special gifts of beading and sewing, who know drum songs and can make drums, who make regalia to dance in pow wows, who are artists and musicians, skilled at sewing and craftwork, and those who are skilled at listening and caring. This is resilience! It is not the clan or the family as it once was 200 years ago, or several thousand years ago, but the stories and expectations and ceremonies are the same, even if expressed in different languages and ways that blend with the modern world the Anishnaabe Nation is forced to live in.

The family /clan has continued on, reclaiming their strength and voice, and asserting that they are still here because of their *mishkauziwin*, because of their resilience and determination. The people in the family recognize that they are unique with a unique role in their nation, and that they are valuable. Their work in reclaiming their family/clan identity is part of a larger reclamation that is ongoing (Battiste, 2000). They know some of their ancestors also shared ancestry with Scots, French, Africans, Irish, Spanish, and other peoples, and value that heritage. There is no part of themselves that they wish to cut off, and there is no anger or hatred toward any of their ancestors, all of whom are valued. They care about future generations, the

environment, the traditions, and the necessary education to be able to move forward. They guard and claim their identity and their relationships with each other.

What is resilience, *mishkauziwin*, in a nation, in human society? It is a transformative process, a healing process that never ends even if some things are gone forever. For this family it is expressed in their *mishkauziwin* and their clan identity. Life doesn't look or function the same way as it did before Europeans came, and there remains sadness and pain about that, but as a family they have not died out or gone away or become so assimilated that their identity is lost. This family can grieve what is gone and will never return, and still sing, dance, drum, laugh, play, feast, argue, agree and disagree, celebrate births and mourn deaths and remember stories and relearn the language. They can incorporate dysfunction, mistakes, and loss into their experience and claim what is healthy and move forward. This family is the young green forest growing up around the remnants of what once was, forming beauty in spite of what was destroyed and disappeared. It isn't the same yet it is the same.

The *mishkauziwin* that is evident through the sharing in the Talking Circles and the interviews regarding the clan role in the nation reaffirms the role that identity has in learning about roles and responsibilities. There is still a sense that the family members do not feel that they know all of what clan membership means regarding their responsibilities, but they are seeking to understand, and making sense out of the choices they are making. Young people are encouraged to engage in education and find ways to work for their communities. They are encouraged to participate in the cultural events that express their Anishnaabe identity and receive positive attention when they demonstrate ability to show leadership. Those members,

who work in administrative positions in the Band Councils, National Parks Departments, regional forestry interests, and mining endeavors, are clear that this is part of their tradition—it is their right and responsibility to care for, and benefit from, their land and territory, a role that is taken seriously. There is a link between who they are and what they do. Their jobs are about more than simply making money. What they do is an extension of how they take care of their families and communities in the sense that what they do is done with thought for the next generations—“for the children.” This is clearly a way that *mishkauziwin* and how it is thought of contributes to a healthy and robust Anishnaabe Nation. Healthy communities build healthy nations.

Promoting and supporting resilience is something that is of concern in almost all major studies regarding resilience. The determinants of well-being for Aboriginal peoples may not be highly visible to the mainstream society, but it is clear that the functioning of the family participating in this study demonstrates both personal and collective capacity and efficacy. In Aboriginal contexts, “Collective efficacy and local control are important because colonialism, government control and tutelage have undermined traditional political structures and autonomy” (Kirmayer et al., 2009, p.98). The function of the family reunions and the decades long efforts the family has made to revitalize their clan identity demonstrate the ways that family members have controlled their own directions and worked to attend to their well-being. The reunions are not Band sponsored or government funded, nor was their research project funded by outside sources. The vision that is being carried forward, despite uncertainties from time to time, is maintained and inspired by continued attention from family members to the nurturance of

relationships within the family. Caring and sharing define these relationships to a large degree, and often in very traditional ways evidenced via gifts of wild foods, regalia for ceremonies, sacred items such as tobacco, smudge bowls, etc. From the small to the large it seems evident that *mishkauziwin* is what makes the positive development possible.

## 6.2 Recommendations: resilience research in indigenous contexts

The discussion here will touch on implications for resilience research in First Nations contexts. This study focused on an Anishnaabe family from northwestern Ontario. Other regions in different parts of the country are the traditional territories of other peoples. There are no claims being made here that suggest our understandings will apply universally to any other Nation, or to non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada or elsewhere, but humans do have shared characteristics of social organization so it follows that the learning process can be adapted to other settings, particularly indigenous settings, and similar patterns of strength and resilience may become apparent. Certainly, other family systems that are not clan-centric can function in similar ways and similar conceptions of strength or resilience echo and resonate in other cultural and ethnic contexts.

### 6.2.1 Responsibilities of research, researchers, and communities.

Research that is done in Aboriginal contexts needs to be grounded in the needs of the Aboriginal community rather than the needs of governmental or other outside organizations. Failures to responsibly ground resiliency research can be considered among the many risks factors faced by Aboriginal peoples who are still experiencing the effects of being targeted by government for exploitation and assimilation (Tousignant & Sioui, 2009). In this case, history

is important, as it is continually re-enacted in the present, significantly hampering Aboriginal peoples' efforts to promote positive development on their own terms. "Aboriginal peoples not only had to endure trauma, but they were at the same time deprived of the tools of resiliency (beliefs, rituals and institutions) which usually help traumatized societies to reconstruct their identity" (p. 45).

Any research that is done must be done in the spirit of responsibility *to* the community, not responsibility *for* the community. Aboriginal communities are responsible for their own research, and when research is conducted in partnership with non-Aboriginal researchers, or researchers who are outsiders to the community, it must be clear from the outset for whose benefit the research is intended. If there are mixed intentions for the research, such as in my case where I desired to engage in a meaningful research project for the purpose of a dissertation at a university, the purposes must be clearly understood. The family had their own purpose for the research. My role became that of facilitator to their learning process and the relationship of study that we established served a dual purpose, which all parties clearly understood. They were helping me through their role in the relationship and we all knew that from the start. We all knew, also, that at the close of the research project, the family would receive their own report from me, which was not part of my dissertation. Issues of ownership and confidentiality were clearly spelled out—no surprises. This was a family project with the side benefit of making a contribution to knowledge. As the researcher I was responsible to the family and the university, a responsibility that does not cease when the study is over. I continue to have an ongoing relationship, albeit of a different nature, with the family. Research in



Aboriginal settings is best when it embraces this concept of mutual responsibility, as this is the primary prevention characteristic for potential damage to the community from research. As the researcher, I understand that there exist forces outside of the family and community which can use research done in Aboriginal settings in ways that work at cross purposes for Aboriginal peoples, and I take steps to attempt to prevent that from happening.

Based on my experience with the relationship of study established with this family, it is clear to me that any research conducted by outsiders is going to be severely handicapped if it is not fundamentally grounded in three essential ways: relationship, time, and spirit. Communities who sponsor research, or agree to participate in a research project, need to give careful thought and consideration as to how these three factors will be addressed prior to beginning the work. I will summarize here how I grounded myself in the relationship of study in these three ways that may not be exactly how another researcher would go about it. This is only one way, which worked for me and for this family.

Firstly, I invested myself over the course of many years in establishing appropriate relationships with as many members of the family as possible. I did this with an approach of mutuality, asking appropriately, learning appropriate protocols, and showing respect as this family understood respect. Prior to initiating the request for conducting research I spent considerable time educating myself extensively on historical and contemporary issues pertaining to Aboriginal peoples in Canada, as well as indigenous communities and concerns around the world. This is an ongoing endeavor on my part. I began to attempt to acquire some basic language abilities so that traditional introductions could be done with appropriate

manners. I spent a long time exploring my ideas with trusted family members before bringing a request for the pilot project to the whole family. I approached the pilot project with an open mind, prepared to follow directions or even to be told that the larger research project was not going to be possible. In every step of the process family members were integrally involved in sharing their thoughts and ideas.

Secondly, we gave ourselves considerable time to conduct the study together in a flexible way. We did not have rigid, predetermined frameworks we were forced to work within, other than the initial design of the research, which was created in a mutual fashion. The issue of timing had to remain one that was guided by the family itself, not the researcher. This made it possible for things to unfold in a way that revealed the essential aspects of family functioning. Taking time and respecting time appropriately facilitated the interactions between family and researcher in a way that was low key and unpressured. There was no forceful, intrusive questioning on my part, although there was considerable and ample opportunity for me to learn how to manage my own stress and anxiety levels in the process. Researchers who are ill-prepared or unable to conduct themselves in a time framework that is respectful of the community in which they are working will find that their efforts to learn become truncated and ineffective.

Thirdly, I learned how to be sensitive to matters of “Spirit” in the research process and in relationships with family members. I attended to my dreams and intuitions and sought understanding about the spiritual matters that were important to the family. I listened with an ear to understanding the ephemeral, liminal, elusive character of the spirit of the research

process itself. For me the ceremony of research was a process that expanded my own personal spiritual journey in ways that I had not imagined. I learned how to recognize the leading of “Spirit,” to “go with the flow,” and to allow things to emerge without a direct pursuit. My abilities to be patient, to wait and listen, to hear between the words, to receive understanding from a larger consciousness—all became heightened in new ways to me through engaging in this research journey.

At the conclusion I am left with the thought that the benefit to my own spirit through this process, as inexpressible as it is, becomes a secondary gain to me, which in turn I am able to share with others. This, by far, outweighs any benefit that may result from a completed dissertation. I believe that research in Aboriginal contexts with this level of spirituality in the process has some small hope of being able to elucidate something about Aboriginal resilience that a mainstream approach is less likely to bring forward. I have come to believe that Spirit is not silent, unseen, and unknowing but is the heart of resilience itself.

### 6.2.2 Boundaries, borders, and bridges

This research project has been a relationship of study established *with*, not *for* or *on*, a family working to deepen their own knowledge about their resilience—their *mishkauziwin*. It is a simple, yet complex relationship of study conducted with an indigenist research approach, grounded in principles and values that do not originate from mainstream cultural foundations, yet accommodating the necessary structures that lead to applicability in the standard academic world. Because of the unique format and subject of the research, the relationship of study encompasses boundary territories both in academic aspects, and personal, social and political

aspects. The “product” or “findings” of the research may be constrained to some extent by the effort to use both Indigenous and Grounded Theory methodological approaches, yet borders of these territories are not always clear, nor are they simple and easy to articulate. The necessary workable bridges to facilitate relationships were certainly enhanced by the decision to use this approach, yet much could be done to further deepen the look into resilience perspectives through additional methods. While making our choices regarding methodology we also acknowledge realization that there are other ways that hold possibilities for the emergence of other perspectives.

Building bridges, whether between peoples or disciplines, or between communities with fundamentally opposing values, is an exercise in building trust. One must come into it with an open mind, allowing more time for the spirit of the work to emerge and relinquishing any need to control outcomes or identify specific findings. From an indigenist research approach it is not possible to simply mix in the language of other research approaches, such as “Grounded Theory”, or “qualitative methods”, or other terminology. A blending of approaches and terminology requires sensitivity. Building relationships must take priority first before anything else, which requires trust on all sides. Non-indigenous researchers must devote attention to building the trust and doing their own work on themselves, before focusing attention on any other aspect of boundaries and borders. These are not discrete activities, and must be woven in an ongoing fashion into the processes as the research proceeds. It requires energy, openness, and tolerance of ambiguity, vulnerability, patience, and willingness to take risks. Because the power differentials are significant the researcher must be clear that he or she is *standing with*,

not *over*, the participants in the research project. This is part of decentering the power structures so that there is no potential power struggle or hierarchical situation clouding the process.

The foundational challenge is relationship and location. This is the difference of working within an indigenist context, in contrast to simply a Participatory Action or Grounded Theory research. It is the first approach in the gift of the study relationship. Looking at research as a gift provides a portal into indigenist approaches that is part of a full tapestry. There is a different level and depth in this type of location than in typical qualitative research. It encompasses the negotiation of emotional, social, spiritual, and physical borders with a respect of boundaries quite different than those within “Western” frameworks of research. We can only begin to go through the portal into indigenist research approaches—a way of knowing. The indigenist “ways of knowing” do not blend well with the usual scientific research methods—observing, describing, testing, measuring, comparing, evaluating—from within the structures of the “Western” academy. The two paradigms contain fundamentally opposing values, actions, and reflections. Yet, we have attempted to bring together the boundaries and borders of those worlds by building bridges through a relationship of study.

These efforts have met the needs of the primary researcher in working within academic structures, and the needs of a family working to understand their *mishkauziwin* and to clarify their perspectives of strength in the revitalization of their family/clan connections and identity. The unique contribution is a study on perspectives of resilience—*mishkauziwin*—that are not readily apparent in the usual mainstream frameworks. It establishes a model of working

together with historical incompatibilities and tensions, and provides an example of how simple, elegant approaches can move through complex issues and emerge with enlightening perspectives.

### 6.3 Summary

In this chapter we discussed the findings regarding resilience as *mishkauziwin*, and our understandings of what that meant from within the view of the Aboriginal family participants directing the study. The strength-based process from within the family system permitted more knowledge of their strength to emerge without forced pursuit but through an unfolding of a work grounded in relationship, time and spirit. The continuity of this strong family, viewed in an ecological perspective, highlights the importance of connection, sharing, humor and responsibility in maintaining identity. The identity of the family enhanced their collective capacity and efficacy and provided an enduring sense of a family/clan with an anchoring identity characterized by concepts of strength. From their perspective, they were part of something larger than themselves, had “*never been broken*” and continued with strong caring and love for each other across time, distances and differences. This sense of continuity sustained the perspectives of *mishkauziwin*.

The discussion addresses issues and recommendations for researchers and communities interested in doing this type of research, which was rooted in a relational process grounded in the interests of the Aboriginal community. Research of this kind carries a responsibility *to* not *for* the participants and promotes a relationship of study constructed on their terms in a collaborative partnership. Researchers working in Aboriginal contexts have a responsibility to

do their own homework prior to beginning their work of building bridges and conducting research in partnership. Trust and collaboration is of key importance to fulfilling responsibilities in an indigenist research approach with whatever other research approaches are applied. The perspective of research as a gift, conducted with respect for indigenous ways, permits relationships to be located effectively in a work of mutual importance. In this study the participants and researcher attempted to build bridges through the relationship of study and thus gain greater understanding of resilience. The family perspective of their *mishkauziwin* that emerged was a simple concept of strength as viewed from within their own experiences.

## Chapter 7

### 7 Conclusion

The journey of this ceremony of research began with the main question about *mishkauzee*. The research participants wanted to know more about their strength as a family, and I wanted to know more about resilience. When I first asked the question, “What is the word for resilience in your language?” I did not know enough of the language to frame the question correctly, as I quickly learned when the response came, “There is no word that means resilience.” Thus began the discussions that marked our work together, beginning with formulating a concept of *mishkauziwinas* meaning resilience, and learning more about their perceptions of their resilience. We began to understand through the work together what it is, where it comes from, how it is expressed, and how it relates to the clan with which the family identifies—the questions raised on the first page of this work.

To find answers to these questions, an indigenous methodology, coupled with interdisciplinarity was deemed the most appropriate. The journey with the family can best be described as a family-directed Grounded Theory, where, by looking at the issue in a recursive manner, with each step informing the other as in the Grounded Theory method, the family was able to work together in a manner reflective of their own forms of traditional learning. The Talking Circles, interviews, and review of findings in an open fashion with the researcher all formed a family-centered approach that best facilitated the learning journey. The validation of the findings is grounded in the journey with the participants.



When the family members agreed that the word *mishkauzee*, meaning “strong,” conveyed an equivalent meaning for the English word “resilience,” we embarked on an exploration of the concept of resilience as strength. As previously stated, I learned that in Anishnaabemowin the word *mishkauziwin* is the noun form of *mishkauzee*, a verb, and would ensure more accuracy in written discourse (M. Corbiere, personal communication, October 3, 2013), so I have used the noun form in my writing although family members in speaking primarily used *mishkauzee* for both verb and noun. This may indicate a dialect difference, or the effect of the predominance of the English language, but both forms of speech express the same concept, strength, as addressed earlier in Chapter 1. Together we found a word in their language that means resilience—*mishkauziwin*—meaning strength. For the family participants the terms *mishkauzee*, *mishkauziwin*, strength, and resilience are interchangeable concepts.

The participants chose to explore their perceptions and knowledge of *mishkauziwin* to understand more about their strength. The significant context of the exploration was in the revitalization which the family had promoted for over 25 years, an effort that began with the purpose of renewing family connections that had long been disrupted, and revolved around a desire to re-establish their identity as a family/clan following a specific clan *Dodem* which gave them their identity. The family participants in the relationship of study wanted to know more about their *mishkauziwin* and were willing to work with me in a structured fashion to focus on understanding their strength and resilience, their *mishkauziwin*. The fact that they had *mishkauziwin*, were *mishkauzee*, was a given, not a question. In Chapter 5 we described their understandings of resilience in more detail. Family participants expressed their concept of

strength and resilience as a process, and also as something inherent within the family, which had always been there. The family perceptions are that they are strong people who have “never been broken,” and that the processes of strength are part of their particular identity in their family/clan. This is their *mishkauziwin*, their resilience.

### 7.1 Lighting the Fire

This whole study process has been focused around the fire in the heart of the family—*mishkauziwin*—resilience. The family revitalizes and maintains this through the family/clan reunions, which grew from a desire to renew family/clan connections and identity. From the beginning of my contact with the family I repeatedly heard the refrain, “This is a strong family.” In this sense, the fire is whatever it is that is within the heart of the family, the heart of each individual family member, which brings strength into their lives.

Thinking about resilience in this fashion indicates that the instrumental nature of mainstream resilience studies that focus on changing individual behavior, or primarily on risk and protective factors, may be problematic for Aboriginal contexts. Luthar and Cicchetti (2000) in their review of resilience research suggest that goals and techniques of efforts to improve resilience should be integrated in community-based approaches. Masten (2001) sees resilience as a common phenomenon, an “ordinary magic,” and is concerned that researchers too often neglect fundamental questions regarding definitions of maladaptation and adaptation. Rutter (1990) calls for more research on the “inoculation factor,” the concept that controlled exposure to stress can create hardiness of response processes. Smith and Carlson’s (1999) review of qualitative and quantitative research on resilience in children and adolescents found that

interventions are likely to be ineffective if they target only single risk factors or stressors. They conclude that there is not necessarily a strong association between risk and maladaptation (p.8).

These views do not allow the light of the fire to enter into consideration. The perceptions of participants in research studies are almost invisible without the deeply personal experience of entering into what their own resilience seems to be from their point of reference. Future research on resilience in Aboriginal contexts needs to focus on clarifying the role of networked support systems, on a wide range of processes rather than individual variables or factors, on greater understanding of ecological perspectives, and on the perspectives of the research participants of their own resilience. It needs to include the fire, which is at the center of identity, and if that fire is not giving light for the person, family or community, examination of factors contributing to the loss of spirit, or fire, must contextualize the whole study (Moeke-Pickering et al., 2006). For peoples who daily live with the intergenerational trauma ensuing from a history of brutal colonization processes, more understanding is needed of the multidimensional psychosocial processes that come into play when looking at human adaptability and resilience. Assimilation efforts of the sort inflicted upon Aboriginal people, such as forced removal of children to residential schools, coupled with their marginalization from Canadian society, make self-identity an integral part of the on-going process of resilience in this type of context.

I conclude that the perceptions of the Anishnaabe family that participated in this relationship of study, where we looked at their understandings of their *mishkauziwin*, indicate that their revitalization efforts as expressed through family/clan reunions mean many things.

*Mishkauziwin* is strength, which to the family means they are resilient, if we want to use that word. Their identity of themselves as a member of their family/clan is that they are a strong family and their concerns center on networks of relationships, which sustain the family/clan identity. Knowing their connections with each other, knowing who they are as a people, knowing their traditional spiritual and cultural practices and language, being able to sustain this and carry it forward into future generations—all of this is important. It is part of the fire inside, which is seen as having been there from time immemorial, ever changing and adapting but never extinguished, never having been broken.

The “*pure, simple love*” (CO1) of the family, and the “*gift of us coming together*” (KO1) through the reunions, is the conveyance of that *mishkauziwin* which keeps the family alive and strong. It will continue to change, grow, shift, lose and gain over the generations, but what happens in the here and now, and in the family/clan revitalization work, is central to their lives. What they do now is important because it includes both past and future, and the intention to carry forward the family/clan reunions is both an expression of *mishkauziwin*, and a guarantee of its endurance. People, languages, and traditional ways of life can be lost, but the strength—the *mishkauziwin*, the *mishkauzee*—will continue as it has from time immemorial. It is what it is—strength—and it was given to them through their inherent identity as part of their specific family/clan. It is a gift from the Creator and means that they, as a family, have a deep and abiding connection to their origins no matter what changes and adaptations they have made.

The family participants’ perception of their resilience, their *mishkauziwin*, embodies the sense that they are strong, loving, connected and engaged in a process of seeking to know more and

to carry forward what they have. The *mishkauziwin* is not questioned and they do not need to discover if they have it, they simply recognize it and live it. Their traditions, and their relationship with the clan *Dodem*, provide core teachings instructing them how to live, and how to overcome difficulties and problems. They are engaged in a process of continuing to learn how to carry forward their strength, their resilience, and to pass on their *mishkauziwin* to future generations. This is a process that is fluid, adaptable, and regenerative, sustaining them into the future. It is a process of resilience that promotes their survival and allows them to thrive as they move forward, honoring their past, their knowledge, and their identity.

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## Appendix A

### **LETTER OF INVITATION FROM THE FAMILY/CLAN**

(Copy by the researcher to preserve anonymity of the family/clan and its members)

2010 Family Reunion Research

January 29, 2010

To the Laurentian University Research Ethics Board:

The (family/clan name withheld) Reunion welcomes the opportunity to support Annie Wenger-Nabigon in her Ph.D. research endeavors at Laurentian University. In 2008 we participated in a Pilot Project Talking Circle at the Family Reunion at (name withheld) First Nation, Ontario, where the family/clan participants unanimously decided to participate in her proposed research with the family on the revitalization of the (family/clan name withheld).

We look forward to engaging in a mutual research endeavor, in relationships of study, to explore and discover together our understandings of our “mishkauzee”, the strength and resilience that we are working to know as we revitalize our family/clan connections. Once again, we look forward to sharing our experiences with Annie Wenger-Nabigon and invite her research as an opportunity that will be mutually beneficial.

Sincerely yours

The (family/clan name withheld) Invitational Signatures

(Names, phone numbers and signatures of three members of the family/clan withheld)

## Appendix B

### Letter of Information to the Family Participants

You are invited to participate in the study of *Mishkauzee* with Laurentian University Ph.D. student, Annie Wenger-Nabigon. The research is titled:

***A First Nation Model of Mishkauzee (Strength; Resilience): The Revitalization of Family/Clan Identity in an Extended Anishnaabe Family of Northwestern Ontario***

I have been working on this study since the pilot project Talking Circle was held at the 2008 Family Reunion. At that time, the family members who participated expressed interest in learning more about their strength and resilience—*Mishkauzee*—and agreed that being part of this study would be one way to do family research that would help family revitalization, and help provide more knowledge about resilience. I have now passed my comprehensive examination at the University and I am eager to proceed with the study.

The study will consist of two Talking Circles and an optional individual interview. The first Talking Circle will be held at the family reunion, August 2010, and the second one will be held immediately following the Family Reunion at a separate location for those family members who were unable to attend. If you are willing to have an individual interview you will need to attend at least one of the Talking Circles, (or if you were unable to attend one of the Talking circles but you are recommended by the family for an interview,) you and I will arrange the

best time and place for an interview. The topics for the Talking Circles are listed on the attached form.

A “*Consent/Information Form*” approved by the Laurentian University Research Ethics Board will be given to all participants at the time of the first Talking Circle to be signed or verbal consent given and so noted by the researcher in writing. Participation in this study is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time with no penalty. There will be no cost to you to participate in this study. All the Talking Circles and interviews will be completed by July 28, 2011, or before. The Talking Circles and interviews will be recorded and transcribed for data analysis. Anonymity coding where all responses are assigned a pseudonym or code to protect individual identities will be used to ensure the confidentiality of all participants. The data will be destroyed after 5 years of storage in a locked file at the University Research Office (locked facility). At no time will anyone have access to the data unless it needs to be verified by my advisor, committee, or the University Research Ethics Board. Names and family identity will not be revealed unless written permission is given for that. The knowledge this study reveals will be shared by my written dissertation, which will be published, and all participants will receive a Family Report at the end of the study. Any family member, participant or not, is welcome to read the dissertation and/or attend the dissertation defense.

I invite interested family members to join this exciting project. If you have any comments, suggestions or questions you may call me at (705)222-4901, or e-mail me at:

ae\_wengernabigon@laurentian.ca, *Annie Wenger-Nabigon*



## Appendix C



PhD in Human Studies  
 Doctorat en sciences humaines  
 Tel /Tél. : 705-1151, 4487  
 Fax/Télééc. : 705-671-6683

## Appendix C

## CONSENT/INFORMATION FORM

**Study Title:** *A First Nation Model of Mishkauzee (Strength; Resilience): The Revitalization of Family/Clan Identity in an Anishnaabe Family of Northwestern Ontario*

**Researcher:** Annie E. Wenger-Nabigon, MSW, Ph.D.(c)

I am a student in the Interdisciplinary Ph.D. in Human Studies Department at Laurentian University studying the topic of *Mishkauzee* –strength, resilience. This study will help us learn more about Anishnaabe extended family members' understandings of their *Mishkauzee*, and contribute to a greater understanding of human resilience in general. Participating in the family research work together, in addition to being satisfying may cause some mild stress, anxiety, fatigue and/or frustration, which can be discussed. If you experience any signs of post-trauma stress reactions (such as: disturbing dreams of past trauma; feeling numb, detached, unreal or dissociative; having flashbacks or needing to avoid things that remind you of past traumas) during the study, you will have a choice of trained counsellors you can see at no cost to yourself. If a counsellor makes a recommendation for you to withdraw from the study, you may withdraw if you choose. **You have the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Your participation in this study is voluntary**, and you will have no costs or research responsibilities beyond your participation. If any other unforeseen negative effects come up during the study, the University Research Ethics Board will halt it during review.

**During the study, you may participate in one or two Talking Circles and/or an individual interview**, both of which will be digitally recorded and transcribed (typed). This is called “data collection”. The writing will not say names or identifying information of any family person or location, and will be “anonymity coded”. (This means a pseudonym, code, or symbol is assigned to responses so that speakers cannot be identified unless they give their written permission for identification.) The data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the University Research Office (locked facility) for five years, after which it will be destroyed. In the event that my data needs to be verified, my thesis supervisor, committee members, or the University Research Ethics Board may review the data. This is solely for completing my doctoral dissertation, *which will be published*, but will not say your or the family name. While publication *shares* findings, at all times the knowledge generated from the research remains “family property” for “family benefit”, and will not benefit me or Laurentian University financially.

**Your personal identity will be confidential and will never be revealed publicly at any time, unless you give your written permission.** You will receive a typed copy of the transcript of your personal individual interview (if you had one), and you can give any feedback and/or corrections to me if you wish. You will also have an opportunity to review the transcription of the Talking circles. Any feedback you give me will become part of the data. If you loan copies of pictures or other documents to be part of my dissertation I will need you to sign consent for their use, and all originals will be returned to you when analysis is complete. You will receive a Family Report at the end of the research process, and may read the dissertation, and/or attend the dissertation defence if you wish. If there is new information relevant to your decision to continue or withdraw from participation, you will be notified in a timely manner.

If you have any questions, concerns, or need more information about the study, being a participant, or about research ethics you can call my advisor/thesis supervisor, Dr. Gratien Allaire, 705/675-1151 x 5026, or the Research Officer of Laurentian University at (705) 675-1151, x 3213.

I agree to participate in this study, and I have received a copy of this information/consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**OPTIONAL:** (Participant \_\_\_\_\_ gave verbal consent at: (place, date, time)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Researcher \_\_\_\_\_)

## Appendix D

### LIST OF TOPICS FOR THE RESEARCH TALKING CIRCLES/INTERVIEWS

*A First Nation Model of Mishkauzee (Strength; Resilience):  
The Revitalization of Family/Clan Identity in an Extended Anishnaabe Family of  
Northwestern Ontario*

Participants of the August 2008 Pilot Project identified the following areas to be covered in interviews and Talking Circles:

- ❖ Knowledge of their Clan, its history, and how they learned about these
- ❖ Knowledge of the decision to do a healing process and start the reunions
- ❖ Definition of mishkauzee(strength, resilience) – what does it means to have it, not have it, how it is gained, what it is like?
- ❖ Understanding of what Clan does (its role) for the individual and family
- ❖ Understanding of how Clan relates to the Anishnaabe Nation
- ❖ How does being a member of a Clan help you have mishkauzee (if it does)?
- ❖ How does mishkauzee influence the development and growth of the family?
- ❖ How has mishkauzee influenced individuals and the family since the beginning the family reunions?
- ❖ Are there other things that are important to know about mishkauzee? About *yo* mishkauzee? How do people find out about that?
- ❖ What other things would you like to know about Clan? About mishkauzee?

The above topics will guide the Talking Circles and individual interviews during the data gathering process.

## Appendix E



**Laurentian University**  
**Université Laurentienne**

Research, Development &  
 Creativity Office  
 Bureau de la recherche,  
 du développement et de la créativité  
 Tel/Tel.: 705-675-1151, 3944  
 Fax/Télé.: 705-671-3850

### APPROVAL FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Research Ethics Board – Laurentian University

This letter confirms that the research project identified below has successfully passed the ethics review by the Laurentian University Research Ethics Board (REB). Your ethics approval date, other milestone dates, and any special conditions for your project are indicated below.

TYPE OF APPROVAL	New	Modifications to project	X	Time extension
Name of Principal Investigator and school/department	Anne Wenger-Nabigon (Ph.D. in Humanities — I.U.); Dr. Gratien Allaire (supervisor)			
Title of Project	<i>A First Nation Model of Misbehavior (Strength, Resilience): the Revitalization of Family/Clen Identity in an Extended Anishnabe Family of Northwestern Ontario</i>			
REB file number	2010-03-10 R1			
Date of original approval of project	April 23 <sup>rd</sup> 2010			
Date of approval of project modifications or extension (if applicable)	December 2 <sup>nd</sup> 2010			
Final/Interim report due on	December 2 <sup>nd</sup> 2011			
Conditions placed on project	None – Annual or final report.			

During the course of your research, no deviations or changes to the protocol, recruitment or consent forms may be initiated without prior written approval from the REB. If you wish to modify your research project, please complete the appropriate [REB form](#).

All projects must submit a report to REB at least once per year. If involvement with human participants continues for longer than one year (e.g. you have not completed the objectives of the study and have not yet terminated contact with the participants, except for feedback of final results to participants), you must request an extension using the appropriate [REB FORM](#).

In all cases, please ensure that your research complies with the [Tri-Council Policy Statement \(TCPS\)](#). Also please quote your REB file number on all future correspondence with the REB office.

Congratulations, and best of luck in conducting your research.

Daniel Côté, Ph.D.  
 Chair of the *Laurentian University Research Ethics Board*  
 Laurentian University