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Thunderbird Women

Indigenous women reclaiming autonomy through stories of resistance

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Cover page: 'Thunderbird Woman and her Eggs' 2016. Image courtesy of Isaac Murdoch

Dedication

This master thesis is dedicated to all grandmothers, mothers, sisters and daughters who create, sustain and protect life;

**To my daughters Summer Raine and Marley Skye for giving me the gift of motherhood;
And to my love, Eirik, for encouraging all of my projects and journeys!**

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Abstract

Indigenous gender roles have been altered by colonialism through both institutionalized patriarchy and the loss of matrilineal cultural traditions. In Canada, the introduction of the Indian Act and other culturally restrictive laws has had particular impact on Indigenous gender relations. In spite of this, Indigenous women are stepping forward to address the limits and damages of repeating cycles of patriarchy in Indigenous institutions. Research and work done by Indigenous women reflects upon Indigenous feminism and the agency of Indigenous women in their communities. In Saskatchewan Canada or Treaty 4 land, where this research is geographically situated, Indigenous women have a long history of agency through storytelling, such as Maria Campbell, Lee Maracle, and Leanne Simpson. The name of this thesis, and the inspiration to create more space for Indigenous women's stories, is the Indigenous myth of Thunderbird Woman, who represents female strength and creation. Thunderbird Woman is a woman who falls in love with a Thunderbird and they get married. She lays eggs made of stone, and the myth states that one day the baby Thunderbirds will hatch and save the world.

This thesis investigates the significance in supporting Indigenous women's voices and the benefit of providing space for storytelling in research methodologies. As such, it reflects upon defining feminisms and maintaining space for Indigenous agency in knowledge production and cultural identity, using autoethnography as part of an Indigenous methodology. My methodology is built upon listening, participating and communicating, in addition to observation and document analysis among and together with Indigenous women in Saskatchewan. The teachings of the Cree medicine wheel (the four directions) inform the Indigenous research paradigm I have designed and use here. My version of the research paradigm includes Indigenous feminist perspectives in Saskatchewan and how they create space for Indigenous women to positively impact their communities through leadership, education and reclaiming cultural traditions.

The women I spoke with possess a vast amount of knowledge and knowing. In this respect, speaking to these women reminded me of my role as student and as someone seeking knowledge. As Linda T. Smith explains, "indigenous research is a humble and humbling activity" (L. T. Smith 2012, 5). These words are a constant reminder of the importance of reflecting, as well as researching. As we as Indigenous peoples become more confident in reclaiming our identities and cultures, we need more community-based definitions of Indigenous feminism and indigenizing knowledge production.

Keywords: Indigenous women, storytelling, Indian Act, Canada, Indigenous methodology, colonial patriarchy, reclaiming, identity

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1.0 Piyesiw/Thunderbird

I open this thesis by sharing the story(s) of Thunderbird. Thunderbird is a visual symbol to many First Nations people. The thunderbird is a mythical, spiritual and cultural metaphor present in many Indigenous stories and myths. The general story of Thunderbird states that they live in the Four Directions (the Medicine Wheel) and that thunder and sometimes lightening is produced by the beating of their wings (Native Languages of the Americas: Cree Legends, Myths, and Stories 1998-2015). The plural pronoun is used in the story because no one knows how Thunderbird came about and how many there are. This is to say that the name itself, Thunderbird, is both plural and singular at the same time. This fluidity of being is a key element of the Thunderbird mythology. Thunderbird is powerful and a source of protection. This is what I remember from the stories I was told when I was younger. I cannot share those exact stories. I can share my version of those stories because they exist in the tradition of oral storytelling. The act of sharing the stories, face-to-face, and with personality, is an important part of myth-telling. Onawa McIvor writes:

(t)here are two main spaces of synergy between an Indigenous research paradigm and autoethnography. The first is the centrality of the ‘self’ in the work... (t) he second is the shared modality and intentional use of storytelling as method. It is a fundamental aspect of autoethnographic approaches, as well as a powerful and traditional part of oral societies (McIvor 2010, 141).

Many families and communities have their own versions of the story, told in a way that reflects where they are situated. Locating the narrative and the act of oral storytelling combine to create a completely unique story, which is aurally imprinted. Paul Whitinui explains that:

(t)raditional knowledge systems have been at the core of our existence as indigenous peoples since time immemorial. As an oral/aural-based society, our ancestors frequently engaged in opportunities to not only test their knowledge at different times and in different situations but also to recall knowledge through the art of story-telling” (Whitinui 2013, 458).

I feel as though I have grown up with the story of the Thunderbird, but with my own understanding and with my own memories connected to the telling.

One of the remarkable features about oral storytelling is that the stories are like jewels that can be discovered, shared, embellished and personalized. Even though the story of Thunderbird was known to me as a child, I could not recall having heard a story which reflected

a female gendered version of the Thunderbird story, including laying eggs and supporting life. In some ways, the standard Thunderbird character seems male in some way, and I had never thought to question if female version existed in the story. Then, in 2016, while in Canada, I saw a breathtaking painting by artist Isaac Murdoch called *Thunderbird Woman and Her Eggs*. Isaac is an Ojibwe artist “whose Ojibway name is Manzinapkinegego’anaabe / Bombgiizhik is from the fish clan and is from Serpent River First Nation” (Onaman Collective 2015). Isaac works with many disciplines including traditional Ojibway paint, imagery/symbolism, harvesting, medicine walks, ceremonial knowledge, cultural camps, Anishinaabeg oral history, birch bark canoe making, birch bark scrolls, as well as youth and elder’s workshops.

The Thunderbird woman image is a striking “doodle” as Isaac calls his paintings. The colors are a stark and contrasting blend of white, black and red. The image was so powerful. I could not stop wanting to know more about the story behind the painting. One of the most fascinating aspects of the image is the stunning depiction of a female, matriarch Thunderbird. This woman is standing, wings out, protecting her eggs which are about to hatch in the nest below her feet. Thunder and lightning are above her, but her wings are strong and provide a safe space for her children to grow.

I spent a lot of time searching for more Thunderbird Woman stories on the Internet and in books, but I couldn’t find the story from Isaac’s painting. In order to learn more, I sent Isaac a message on Facebook asking about the image, about Thunderbird Woman, and where I could find more on this part of the myth. Isaac proceeded to share with me the story he had heard from his grandmother, which inspired his work.

He wrote, “Aanii / Hello Amanda, I really don't know anything other than from what my Grandmother told me as a child. Long ago, a young Woman fell in love with a Thunderbird. They eventually got married and had a family. She laid many eggs made of stone on top of the mountain where they lived. One day those eggs will hatch, and baby Thunderbirds will come out and save the earth.”

I responded, “(y)ou are very lucky to have heard this story and are able to share with others. My grandfather past away when my dad was 12 ... (and) (m)y dad went to a residential school and he had a tough life. I am often searching for these stories. Is it ok with you that I quote your story and share it further? For me, Thunderbird woman is an important metaphor for all the strong Indigenous women I have been lucky to meet and learn from and I am hoping to

share this story to illustrate the strength of Indigenous women! Please let me know your thoughts, meegwetch.” Isaac’s reply was simple and gracious, “please do”.

2.0 Context and Thesis question

The story of Thunderbird, as Isaac understood it and told it to me, is central to my thesis work. The above introduction to this story indicates why. The context to my work is the fact that Indigenous women have, over time, been disempowered. Their power in their communities is and has been altered by the imposition of the Indian Act on Indigenous people in Canada. Gwen Brodsky writes that “(a) consequence of such legislation was the disruption of Aboriginal cultures through the imposition of colonial concepts on social organization and the introduction of patriarchal concepts, which did not exist before, into many Aboriginal societies.” She continues, “(t)he legislation mirrored the colonial society’s patriarchal practices and sexist attitudes toward women” (Brodsky 2014, 105).

Due to the marginalization of their voices, my thesis asks broadly: how does Indigenous storytelling provide a space for Indigenous women in Saskatchewan to positively impact their communities through leadership, education and cultural revitalization? Here I reference specifically, Camp Justice for Stolen Children in Regina, Saskatchewan and the stories of Indigenous women in the Regina community. I also reference the Missing and Murdered Indigenous movement as well as how these stories are connected by the history of the *Indian Act*’s legislation in Canada. In addition, I ask, what positive impacts can result from the intersections of Indigenous feminism, decolonized theories and the reclaiming Indigenous traditions?

In the context of this thesis, I refer to Indigenous storytelling as belonging to the history of oral storytelling of sharing knowledge related to the self and the universe. This is consistent with Vine Deloria Jr.’s explanation and use of storytelling in his writings on relatedness (Deloria Jr 1999, 37-38). Cultural revitalization is a popular term in many fields. I will clarify my use of it. In this project, cultural revitalization refers to reclaiming traditions as a means of reawakening their place in Indigenous communities. This means practicing traditions as well as having agency over redefining how to express a traditional and current Indigenous identity. Such an understanding reflects the work and writings of Linda T. Smith (L. T. Smith 2012), Joyce Green (Green 2007), Leanne Simpson (Simpson 2014) and Rauna Kuokkanen (Kuokkanen 2012). In

addition, in this thesis, I rely heavily on the writings of Arvin, Tuck and Morrill and their definitions of key terms such as “settler colonialism, colonial heteropatriarchy and heteropaternalism” (Arvin, Tuck og Morrill 2013, 11-13). Furthermore, I employ the term resilience to reflect the notion of finding strength to overcome trauma through a reclaiming of Indigenous identity and connection to Indigenous culture. Stories of resilience inspire other Indigenous people to start a journey of healing through practicing and sharing Indigenous traditions. For instance, the story of Stacey, one of the women featured in my research, reflects her journey of healing from the generational trauma of our dad’s residential school experience and his difficulties coping with those impacts. The story of Carol Rose, also a woman in my work, reflects the power in reclaiming Indigenous identity after growing up away from her community. Finally, the women at Camp Justice for Our Children share stories of reacting to the injustices to the treat of Indigenous children and youth. Not only do all these women prevail over traumatic experiences, but they also demonstrate strength through healing and action.

Owning knowledge is a powerful thing. When we recognize what we know and how we know it, as a culture and as individuals, we can see the connections and locate ourselves within a larger narrative. In this way, we come back to sharing stories. Our stories are like pieces of the puzzle, pieces that need to connect and that belong in a place. Linda T. Smith writes, “research is not a distant academic exercise but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions” (L. T. Smith 2012, 5). Sharing knowledge through storytelling is a way to connect to related stories from family and serves as a connection between communities. My perspective is that I am related to my research like a sibling. It is a part of my family and a part of me. The incentive for sharing my story, and other Indigenous women’s stories, is to open space for more experiences and to influence other Indigenous women to step forward and provide a connection to their perspective. Storytelling is consistent with what western research has come to define as autoethnography. Paul Whitiui explains: “(i)ndigenous autoethnography as a resistance-discourse is intended to inspire people to take action toward a legitimate way of self-determining one’s collective and cultural potential” (Whitiui 2013, 481).

To form an Indigenous research practice, I integrate an Indigenous approach to autoethnography, a decolonized theoretical approach, and Indigenous-based epistemologies such as the medicine wheel. In the article, Mary Smith elaborates:

(i)n this regard, the auto ethnographer within the Indigenous context uses the self to decolonize research through explication and synthesis of their Indigenous values and ways of being that are inherent to the diverse cultural context in which they live. The auto ethnographer interprets the experience in relation to cultural values and epistemologies (M. Smith 2015, 5).

Furthermore, I focus on the intersections between Indigenous feminism and cultural revitalization in relation to reclaiming power for women in Indigenous communities. Here, I acknowledge the groundbreaking work of Kimberly Crenshaw from 1989, which focused on the intersections of race and gender (Crenshaw 1989). Additionally, I reference Torjer. A Olsen's work on intersectionality and discussion of indigenous feminism (Olsen 2017, 509). Olsen writes, "(u)sing a n intersectional perspective, regardless of how you term it, enables you to understand people as belonging to a diversity of contexts and/or identities at the same time". (Olsen 2017, 518). Similarly, I acknowledge the significant article by Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, Angie Morrill. They offer that, "the first challenge is to problematize and theorize the intersections of settler colonialism, heteropatriarchy, and heteropaternalism (Arvin, Tuck og Morrill 2013, 14). One important aspect of this thesis work is the relationship between locating oneself and recognizing the connection to land, community and redefining cultural identity. This relationship is appreciated in examples such as Cree author and performer Carol Rose GoldenEagle (published name Daniels) book of poems titled *Hiraeth*. In her foreword, Carol writes, "hiraeth – pron. (HERE – eyeth) n. a homesickness for a home to which you cannot return, a home which maybe never was; the nostalgia, the yearning, the grief for the lost places of your past" (Daniels 2018, foreword). In this definition of the Cree word, hiraeth, the significance of land and a link to the land of past and present are of equal value. Memories of place shared through stories and cultural identity related to the land are key parts of belonging to an Indigenous community. This is why I have chosen to write about my Indigenous women in my home land of Saskatchewan, Canada. The terrain at home is a powerful reminder of my place in nature and in my family. It is a connection to all of my ancestors who have lived there. As Linda Smith states: "Indigenous people want to tell our own stories, write our own versions, in our own ways, for our own purposes" (L. T. Smith 2012, 28).

The data I collected and collaborated upon draw heavily from the tradition of storytelling as a medium for indigenizing identities and supporting stronger community ties. That is to say, my fieldwork consisted of conversations, stories, experiences and informal interviews. Bagele

Chilisa describes the importance of storytelling as “central to the lives of the colonized other” and that “(stories) have been used to collect, deposit, analyze, store and disseminate information and as instruments of socialization” (Chilisa 2012, 138). My methodological foundation is formed by a combination of participation and communication as key tools for cultural revitalization and sovereignty. My methods involve taking part in traditional customs, storytelling and listening to the participants in the field. Acknowledging the relationships created through the act of research is a form of indigenizing research, as the women and people I interact with and form relationships with become a part of me. Aileen Moreton-Robinson describes that “as a presupposition of an Indigenous social research paradigm, relationality is a historically enduring discursive formation that gives rise to distinct forms of thought, often unconscious, which inform the intellectual work and research of Indigenous scholars” (Moreton-Robinson 2017, 71). In this way, Indigenous researchers ideally form relationships based on respect and honesty, which can lead to fieldwork and actions which can have a real-world impact on the relationships formed throughout the process of research. In this way, the research relationship is open to the prospect of negative or difficult discussions related to research. Here, I bring in Olsen’s discussion of harmony in Indigenous discussions of gender and feminism. In Olsen’s article, he references Shawn Wilson’s account in his notable article on Indigenous research paradigms from 2008 that “referencing the negative implies giving power to disharmony and alienation (Olsen 2017, 512). In terms of the stories of overcoming loss and trauma, I offer that the medicine wheel provides a more comprehensive understanding of the balance between harmony and opening space for disharmony. From the perspective of balance in the medicine wheel, it is necessary to honor honesty over idealism.

Indigenous feminisms are a branch of Indigenous studies that still require space to expand and develop. Kuokkanen writes about the intersection of defining Indigenous feminisms through the perspective of human rights (Kuokkanen 2012), while Joyce Green’s collection, offers perspectives on Indigenous feminisms and the connection to social position (Green 2007, Intro). Chilisa’s discussion of Indigenous feminisms addresses post-colonial approaches to Indigenous feminism (Chilisa 2012, 261-262). One approach to supporting space for Indigenous understandings of gender roles and Indigenous women’s agency is identifying Indigenous women’s life stories as texts of resistance to standard discourse. Mary Smith quotes Onawa McIvor and Paul Whitinui to support Indigenous voices in research, “(m)erging within

Indigenous perspectives, autoethnography may be recognized for its ability to bring forwards the cultural life story where colonial conventions are challenged (McIvor, 2010; Whitinui, 2013) (M. Smith 2015, 5). As such, I endeavor to bring forth stories which highlight Indigenous women's experiences of resurgence and strength. In Saskatchewan, many Indigenous women contribute to their communities by sharing experiences of resilience as defined earlier, from the negative impacts of colonial patriarchy and by reclaiming women's traditional knowledge. Academic research can also provide a space where this kind of discourse can also be recognized and even indigenized. Linda T. Smith explains, "indigenous work has to 'talk back to' or 'talk up to' power" and one way of achieving this is by contributing to Indigenous women's space in academic work and knowledge production (L. T. Smith 2012, 226). By embarking on a journey of indigenizing my academic experience, I aim to open space for more Indigenous women to write and contribute to decolonizing knowledge production in Indigenous studies. Part of this is supporting Indigenous methods as well as ensuring that Indigenous research practice is given space to grow in volume and to relate to more fields of study. Indigenous studies intersects with all parts of academic research and therefore, must be allowed to find new ways to design research projects which will impact Indigenous communities in productive ways.

3.0 Historical Context of the Indian Act and its gendered impacts

In this section, I detail the historical aspects of the Indian Act in relation to the autonomy and identity of Indigenous women in Canada. Much has been written about the discriminating laws in the *Indian Act* in Canada which was first enacted in 1857, from Arvin, Morrill and Tuck's discussion (Arvin, Tuck og Morrill 2013), to Kuokkanen (Kuokkanen 2012) and Brodsky (Brodsky 2014). The document from the First Nations Education Steering Committee shares historical articles about the restrictive nature of the Indian Act and the intention to insert colonial institutions in Indigenous education (First Nations Steering Committee n.d.). Here, I provide a brief overview and discussion of the main parts of the *Indian Act* related to my thesis and research. In particular, I highlight a court case which argued for the re-instatement of the rights of Indigenous women, which precludes the question of whether Indigenous women have been negatively impacted by the legislation of the *Indian Act*.

In reading the *Indian Act*, one can sense the disenfranchisement of Indigenous women. Its intention seemed to be to make them invisible. Commenting on this, Gwen Brodsky reports that:

(f)rom 1857... women were treated disadvantageously compared to men” and (b)y means of this provision, the government assumed control over who was Indian and *The Gradual Civilization Act*, instituted the policy that women who married men without Indian status lost their own status (Brodsky 2014, 104-105).

This gender-based discrimination continued through the variations of the *Indian Act* and in 1867, it even explicitly stated that “an Indian was legislatively defined as a male Indian, the child of a male Indian or the wife of a male Indian” (Brodsky 2014, 105). In 1957, the former Gradual Citizen Act officially became known as Bill C-3, the *Indian Act*. Notably, in 1981, the United Nations Human Rights Committee found that “the loss of Indian women’s status pursuant to section 12(1)(b) of the 1951 Indian Act violated the right to enjoy cultural life under the ICCPR in *Lovelace vs Canada*” (Brodsky 2014, 107). This and other pressures resulted in the Canadian government amending the act, and Bill C-31 was the result in 1985. Brodsky concludes, “(d)espite government promises, Bill C-31 continued to prefer descendants who trace their Indian ancestry along the paternal line over those who trace their ancestry along the maternal line” (Brodsky 2014, 107).

The colonial power to redefine Indigenous peoples’ access to power and visibility in their communities had long-term impacts on the agency of Indigenous women as people with rights. Arvin, Tuck and Morrill write about “problematizing settler colonialism” and, in this regard, note that “as settler nations sought to disappear Indigenous peoples’ complex structures of government and kinship, the management of Indigenous peoples’ gender roles and sexuality was also key in remaking Indigenous peoples into settler state citizens” (Arvin, Tuck og Morrill 2013, 14-15). It is also necessary to include here the further development of the *Indian Act* which from 1920 legislated the Residential School Act. “In 1920, under the *Indian Act*, it became mandatory for every Indian child to attend a residential school and illegal for them to attend any other educational institution” (Columbia 2009).

This fact is relevant to understand how gender roles were and are shaped by colonial perspectives and definitions. Before the *Indian Act* and colonization, diverse communities of Indigenous people were governed by matriarchy as a philosophy and for connecting families. The female was a powerful identity and symbol in matriarchal communities, as shown in myths of the female spirit and power of Indigenous women’s ability to create and sustain life. These

ideals are represented in the female characterization of Mother Earth and Grandmother Moon. (NWAC, Native Women' Association of Canada Facebook page 2018). It is important to note that this does not necessarily mean that life in Indigenous communities was better or more equal. However, it is worth noting that the argument that everything was perfect before colonial times is not the point of addressing changes in Indigenous gender roles. Instead, the discussion is about the impacts of loss of identity related to gender roles, loss of land and loss of family support. In this sense, it means that indigenizing human rights for women means stepping outside the colonial system and allow Indigenous communities and people to self-define and reclaim the gender power balance for women. Arvin, Tuck and Morrill discuss this notion in terms of “(r)efuse erasure but do more than include” (Arvin, Tuck og Morrill 2013, 17). In this way, making space for women’s voices and bringing matriarchy back into focus is part of moving beyond inclusion to more active forms of decolonization.

The disruption in Indigenous gender roles resulted in a physical and emotional loss for Indigenous women. They were subject to physically losing access to their land, and metaphorically losing access to their families and ties to their community. The benefits of the matriarchy in Indigenous communities included the visibility and inclusion of women as partners and leaders in the community. Gender rights which existed before colonization were negatively impacted by colonial constructs. As Kuokkanen explains, “(t)he reality in Indigenous communities today is that the internalization of patriarchal colonial structures has resulted in circumstances where women often do not enjoy the same level of rights and protection as men” (Kuokkanen 2012, 235). The nature of pre-colonial relationships, gender and duty are difficult to dissect from the settler perspective through which Indigenous history is viewed. However, many of the stories and legends which exist in oral and written form point to a more involved definition of gender which is based on attributes related to character rather than gender. Arvin, Tuck and Morrill state, “(n)ative feminist theories further point to the fact that the very categories of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ are creations of heteropatriarchy and settler colonialism” (Arvin, Tuck og Morrill 2013, 18). An example of this is the concept of “enfranchisement”. Although this legislation began before the *Indian Act*, it was also a large part of a colonial gendered approach to defining the rights of Indigenous women and their descendants from their communities. Enfranchisement meant that “Indian women who married non-treaty Indian men, white men, or Metis were considered "enfranchised" and could, upon their request and approval

by their First Nation, be provided with a one-time payment of ten years' worth of annuities, referred to as commutation (Ojibwe Metis communities, Dibaajomowin: (DIS)Enfranchisement of Indigenous women 2019). Even though Indigenous women were said to be able to have the choice of whether they gave up status for a one-time payment – known as commutation - in times of poverty, it is difficult to determine whether free choice existed in the sense we understand it today. As well, in the 1920's, the government removed the right to refuse commutation , and this meant Indigenous women were often enfranchised without their consent (Ojibwe Metis communities, Dibaajomowin: (DIS)Enfranchisement of Indigenous women 2019). In the document, *An Act for the gradual enfranchisement of Indians, the better management of Indian affairs, and to extend the provisions of the Act 31st Victoria, Chapter 42*, the government details how enfranchisement and the eventual *Indian Act* legislated Indigenous women's right to their identity and community (Government of Canada 1869, 6-8). The result of enfranchisement meant that many Indigenous women lost connections to their land, people and stories. They also lost the ability to share their stories with their families and communities. Additionally, as Gwen Brodsky highlights, Indigenous people themselves did not support the legislation involved in the *Indian Act*. She writes,

(i)t is not as though the problem of Indian Act sex discrimination has newly come to the attention of the federal government... An early example of protest noted by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples is that in 1872, the Grand Council of Ontario and Quebec Indians sent the Minister in Ottawa a strong letter which contained the following passage: They (the members of the Grand Council), also desire amendments to Sec. 6 of the Act of (18) 69 so that Indian women may have the privilege of marrying when and whom they please, without subjecting themselves to exclusion or expulsion from their tribes and the consequent loss of property and rights they may have by virtue of their being members of any particular tribe." footnote 11-RCAP 1996. (Brodsky 2014, 137).

Therefore, although Indigenous women were defined by the *Indian Act*, the stories and myths of Indigenous women which carried on remained to be characterized from an Indigenous perspective. The strong women in Indigenous stories exist in a form which can be retold and remembered. The story of Thunderbird woman is one example of precolonial knowledge. As well, there are the stories about Grandmother Moon, Mother Earth and Warrior women

“okitcitakwe” as they were called in Cree (Ojibwe Metis communities, Dibaajimowin: Warrior Women 2019). The online source *Dibaajimowin* is a collaboration of stories and information accumulated by Métis and Ojibwe communities to be shared. Their page about warrior women includes stories of these Indigenous women and describes how women were given the same honour as men as warriors and the women’s stories of battle were shared equally (Ojibwe Metis communities, Dibaajimowin: Warrior Women 2019). Again, stories from Indigenous women prove to be an important part of Indigenous communities.

The *Indian Act* persists in imposing colonial definitions of Indigenous identity and assigning unequal value to gender. Brodsky explains that the *Indian Act* still “continues to assign people to different categories of status based on sex” (Brodsky 2014, 112). A number of people prefer to use their Indigenous nation name, such as Cree or Ojibwe. Others self-define Métis, Inuit or First Nation or even use their Indigenous language to describe their community as in Nehiyaw people (Cree). Even so, the Canadian Government continues to write new legislation as a means to rectify the inequalities of the *Indian Act*. However, these new laws do not address past losses to community or the problem of the *Indian Act* as a tool for defining Indigenous people. As an attempt to address gender discrimination in the *Indian Act*, the government introduced Bill C-3 known as the Gender Equity amendment. This law was meant to fix the gender inequality in the *Indian Act*, however, the amendment falls short in many respects (NWAC, A Short History of Sex-Based Inequities in the Indian Act 2018). For instance, the Gender Equity amendment does not explain that status once again disappears with Sister’s great grandchild. The problem continues to be the loss of legal Indigenous status, which results in a community and family disconnect.

The Native Women’s Association of Canada discusses the most previous amendment to the *Indian Act*, Bill S-3. They state, “(t)he *Indian Act* and its amendments over the years have been convoluted and purposefully confusing. Bill S-3, which passed in the House in December 2017, is yet another amendment to a colonial and paternalistic piece of legislation (see Figure...) (N. NWAC, Bill S-3 Infograph 2018). In addition, as a reaction to Bill S-3, the Native Women’s Association authored the report, “*Eliminating Discrimination under the Registration Provisions of the Indian Act*”. This report gives a detailed description of gender inequalities which stem from the *Indian Act* and provides recommendations for countering the negative impacts of the

Indian Act (N. NWAC, NWAC Report 2018, 6-11). Appendix 1, 2 and 3 show the amendments of Bill S-3 and the nature of status for Indigenous people (N. NWAC, Bill S-3 Infograph 2018).

It is critical to note that the loss of connection to land in Bill C-31 had an economic impact as well as cultural. A loss of land meant a real economic impact on Indigenous women and their future children and grandchildren. As well, the ability to distribute wealth and share cultural knowledge with daughters and future women was abruptly discontinued by the colonial government. Occupying land and acknowledging the loss of Indigenous women's rights are some tools being integrated into a resistance against the continuation of Bill C-31 and other laws which seek to define Indigenous peoples. Online, many articles detail women occupying and governing land for themselves and their communities (Anderson 2019). In Saskatchewan, the Indigenous women at Camp Justice occupied land on legislative grounds for over 180 days in order to bring attention to stories of Indigenous children's loss and trauma as well as demand that the justice system in Canada re-evaluates its' treatment of Indigenous women and children (Camp Justice for our Stolen Children 2018).

Another important aspect of the debate over the *Indian Act* is the opposition and backlash which arose in the 1980's to changing legislation for the benefit of Indigenous women. Kuokkanen addresses the backlash and states, "(t)he mobilization of Indigenous women in Canada to advance their human, civil, and political rights and to end gender discrimination and violence in their communities was not well-received by indigenous male leadership (Kuokkanen 2012, 235). In their article discussing decolonizing feminism, Arvin, Tuck and Morrill outline how,

(t)here is power in tribal governments whose claims for sovereignty are dependent on recognition of a racist, colonial empire, power that Native feminist theories undermine... opponents of change borrowed settler colonial gender norms to strictly divide their First Nation communities into men and women laying blame with the latter category for being too feminist (Arvin, Tuck og Morrill 2013, 22).

It is one thing to have limited rights as all women experience in some way in their lives. However, for Indigenous women, the *Indian Act* is a continued barrier to gender equality. The legislation of the *Indian Act* defines Indigenous people from a colonial perspective and is a barrier to the right to cultural heritage. The *Indian Act* stands in the way of acknowledging Indigenous women's autonomy and redefining gender relations in Indigenous communities.

Indigenous studies programs are a part of academic research and as such, Indigenous researchers are a necessary part of expanding the field in a meaningful way. It is also essential that Indigenous studies research recognizes the role of gender in discussing the notion of self-determination. Rauna Kuokkanen states that “(i)n the past several years, there has been exponential growth of research on various aspects of Indigenous peoples and self-determination... (h)owever, very few studies examine these issues from a gendered perspective or apply a gender-based analysis” (Kuokkanen 2012, 225-226). Aileen Moreton-Robinson explains that “(a)s an expression of Indigenous sovereignty most Indigenous researchers adhere to a research agenda informed by our respective cultural knowledges, ethics and protocols” (Moreton-Robinson 2017, 69). In this way, as an Indigenous person, it is vital that any research project I design must honor my cultural heritage and future possibilities of co-operation (Rappaport 2008, 1-3). Part of opening a space for co-operation means sharing my story as part of connecting and forming relationships with participants. As Onawa McIvor explains: “(t)he method of autoethnography is also largely about telling stories, in this case, one’s own. As a research methodology, it extends beyond the realm of storytelling for entertainment, but not unlike much Indigenous storytelling, it holds a greater purpose of teaching, learning, and, at times, creating new knowledge” (McIvor 2010, 140). For example, the medicine wheel, which informs my cultural philosophy, is based on ideas of relationality in all aspects of life. For me, this includes the academic process of creating projects where I can contribute to honoring the relationships and connections in my communities. This type of research includes being connected to the act of sharing knowledge and stories. As Linda T. Smith succinctly explains, “(s)haring knowledge is a long-term commitment (L. T. Smith 2012, 16).

Much has been much written about the possibility of knowing cultures before colonization, and so I will write only briefly in this aspect of the topic. One important problem with defining prior Indigenous gender roles is the known and unknown impacts of colonialism. Sherry Farrell-Racette explains,

(o)ur ability to understand (or even locate) the gender relationships that existed prior to colonization is complicated by an array of overlapping factors: the tumultuous history that separates us from our pasts, gender bias in early historic documents and the manner in which anthropologists and other scholars have conducted research to advance or dispute ideas about gender relations as universal truths (Farrell-Racette, *This Fierce Love: Gender, Women, and Art Making* 2010, 28).

I also position myself as an active participant with a feminist Indigenous perspective. My personal definition means accepting that the impacts of the *Indian Act* redefined Indigenous gender and power balance in Indigenous communities in order to replace matriarchy with patriarchy. Bagele Chilisa describes in *Indigenous Research Methodologies* that:

(a) postcolonial indigenous feminist perspective moves out of the cage of universalized Western gender theory and employs postcolonial and Indigenous perspectives to reveal local standpoints that express girls' and women's agency and resistance to oppression (Chilisa 2012, 261).

The colonial history of unethical research related to measuring and comparing of Indigenous peoples is still a source of trauma for Indigenous communities. Aileen Moreton-Robinson explains, "(t)he metaphysical basis of objectivity within social science and humanities methodologies disavows embodiment, rendering race and gender invisible enablers in the production of knowledge" (Moreton-Robinson 2017, 75). The tendency to limit others by outside definitions is common in the story of research. Unfortunately, education and law can be tools of the colonial state. Indigenous peoples historically had agency over their lives until the point of contact. Their autonomy was problematic for colonial governments when implementing laws. In Tamara Starblanket's essay *Treaty Negotiations and Rights*, she explains:

(a)t the time of Treaty, Indigenous Peoples had full authority over their way of life and the land. When Treaty was negotiated, Indigenous law was the law of the land and used by the Crown to conclude Treaties. For example, in 1876 when Treaty Six was negotiated and concluded it was Cree laws that guided the negotiation process (Starblanket 2018, 4).

Defining people and using science to justify these definitions is a powerful tool of the colonial system. This is how the *Indian Act* and residential schools represent not only a system of defining, but also a means to colonize the Indigenous identity.

4.0 Methodological approach

I have spent a good deal of time debating with myself over which language style to use for this introduction and throughout the piece. This is what will set the tone of the paper. First impressions are, of course, paramount. At first, I started writing with a distanced, somewhat clinical language. This is what a Master thesis is, I thought to myself. It should be instructional. These concerns are strikingly similar to those of Onawa McIvor. In her PhD project, she shares the following: "I struggled to begin this paper in 'the right way.' I continually felt a compulsion

to frame, justify, and defend what I was doing within a Western framework that would therefore be ‘acceptable’ ” (McIvor 2010, 138). These words have comforted me in my own doubts, and as I continued to write and edit, I quickly realized that I need to incorporate my voice as an Indigenous researcher; this is the importance of my perspective. The whole point of my project, from the first spark of the idea on what to research, to the stages of reflection that came after fieldwork, was to seek out and use my voice and encourage others to use theirs as well. As Lee Maracle writes about feminism in sociology, “(l)et’s begin by talking to each other about ourselves” (Maracle 1996, 139). These words reflect an important part of my methodology, which is to open spaces for women and girls to explain and define for themselves what it is that *they* are experiencing. This method of opening space for Indigenous women to be included *and* inspire change is vital to decolonizing academic institutions. As Arvin, Tuck and Morrill state, “inclusion... cannot be the primary goal because inclusions confers a preeminent hierarchy, and inclusion is central to hierarchical power” (Arvin, Tuck og Morrill 2013, 17). Including my relationship to the subject, the participants and the land is a key perspective which requires reflection and awareness. Moreton-Robinson writes that, “(r)elationality forms the conditions of possibility for coming to know and producing knowledge through research in a given time, place and land” (Moreton-Robinson 2017, 71).

4.1 Locating my voice as researcher

What does it mean to be a researcher? This is not a question that belongs to me, or just me. I think everyone who wants to work with understanding people (basically everyone) should ask themselves the same question. Anyone who wants to write about a culture or a group of people and their language and customs. What does the word research mean, what does it refer to, what is its history and how is research used to propagate colonial frameworks? What is the story of research? These and many questions, as referenced in the introduction of Sources and Methods in Indigenous Studies, are part of locating one’s self in the research process and result (Andersen and O’Brien 2017, 1). In Chilisa’s text, this is referred to as reflexivity and this concept is vital to the research I participate in as an Indigenous person (Chilisa 2012, 173-174).

My research process is a combination of planning and improvising, as I encountered people and opportunities in the field. Chilisa refers to this type of research as “(t)he action research cycle, and writes, “(a)ction research is a process of doing, reflecting on the action,

drawing conclusions, and then reflecting again on the process” (Chilisa 2012, 227). Further, Chilisa writes about the “decolonization of action research” and describes “...indigenization has led to two types of action research... participant as co-researcher and ... the participatory transformative research approach” (Chilisa 2012, 229). My research approach is closely linked to a transformative approach, where I not only participate and observe, but I also include reflection as a part of the research process. During fieldwork, I was faced with choosing a fixed plan or allowing the participants to impact on the process. I chose to allow for space for reflection to impact on the process and a few examples of how I worked with this include when I was respectfully and graciously invited to a few coffee dates with a noted Métis feminist scholar and artist; when my daughters and I visited the women leaders at the Camp Justice for Our Stolen Children on the legislative grounds in Regina, Saskatchewan, and when I was introduced to local Indigenous spoken word and singer who invited my girls and I to see her show in the park, and then to drive us to her house at Regina Beach to talk and share stories. Lastly, I opened my mind and my heart as I shared stories, experienced Indigenous traditional tattoo practice and appreciated the seeing and being a part of cultural knowledge in practice with a local artist who happens to be my sister. I am connected to these women and their stories in one way or another. My research and this practice is decolonizing. “Decolonization,” writes Chilisa, “is thus a process of conducting research in such a way that worldviews of those who have suffered a long history of oppression and marginalization are given space to communicate from their frames of reference” (Chilisa 2012, 14).

As I was discussing the dilemma of locating myself and choosing language with my sage advisor, she reminded me to “find a linguistic currency that works for me”. These words have helped me to own the language choices I make and appreciate the opportunity to be a part of sharing Indigenous women’s stories of strength. Rauna Kuokkanen aptly concludes: “Indigenous women’s rights remain a contentious and often neglected issue at both international and local level” (Kuokkanen 2012, 129).

4.2 Autoethnography and narrative analysis

This section is about the connection between Indigenous autoethnography and stories as knowledge. The first two parts discuss storytelling and the next sections explain the teachings and philosophies involved with the medicine wheel.

4.2a Methods of Indigenous storytelling

In these sections, I outline my approach to autoethnography as a method to share information and as a means to connect that information. These sections are connected by their relationship to stories as a part of my research focus and as a method to communicate information about the relationships with participants, history of the relationship and the meaning in our relationship. Further, storytelling is a way to connect older traditions with new experiences. Beverly Singer describes “(t)he chance to remedy the lack of literature about telling our own stories is deeply connected to being self-determined as an Indian. It is part of a social movement that I call [cultural sovereignty,] which involves trusting in the older ways and adapting them to our lives in the present” (Singer 2001, 2).

4.2b Autoethnography as Indigenizing knowledge production

Autoethnography provides a theoretical background from which to interpret life stories and other ways knowing of knowing represented in Indigenous epistemologies. As part of an Indigenous methodology, research conversations, experience/participation and historical analysis combine to create a space where knowledge and relationality contribute to the formation of new ways to explore inquiry and research. Onawa McIvor summarizes, “(t)here are two main spaces of synergy between an Indigenous research paradigm and autoethnography. The first is the centrality of the ‘self’ in the work... (t) he second is the shared modality and intentional use of storytelling as method. It is a fundamental aspect of autoethnographic approaches, as well as a powerful and traditional part of oral societies” (McIvor 2010, 141). Vine Deloria Jr details the method of observation and how knowledge based on this type of practice develops over time, in co-operation with time (Deloria Jr 1999, 37-39). Observing is combined with participating with the environment over a period of time and this produces a unique knowledge base, which is passed on through time by oral storytelling. I will discuss autoethnographic storytelling as methodology later, yet it is important to note here that land-based observational knowledge gathering provides a way of learning and a source for storytelling, relating and sharing culture.

My own story, my dad’s story and many other people’s stories are intertwined. Part of locating my voice is also to recognize how the act of self-reflecting is mirrored back at me through the stories of others and by others. The position of being a story-teller brings many benefits to the sharing of knowledge and relating that experience to another person’s story in a

separate yet equal way. All of the women I have spoken with and all of the activities I have observed and participated in are a part of a story, which we have collaborated in producing. This type of knowledge production combines all parts of the whole group of women involved and it is related to the teachings of the Cree/Indigenous medicine Wheel. The story of the medicine wheel is also a part of who I am as an Indigenous scholar as it is a story that I have carried with me throughout my life. The teachings of the medicine wheel are a part of my identity as a storyteller and researcher. Incorporating an Indigenous epistemology is also a way for me to reflect an Indigenous perspective in Indigenous research and include another aspect to stories as ways of knowing.

The story of the medicine wheel has been told in many ways over many years, and by many people. One characteristic of oral stories and knowledge is that the core is fixed, while the outer elements are fluid and reflect the passing of seasons in the physical world. This is reflected in visual representations of the medicine wheel. The core is fixed and embodies the self in whichever way it is understood. It can be a group, person or event. The point is that the center of the wheel is core, that around which all other parts are connected by. The medicine wheel is based in the natural world and so, the epistemologies represent this perspective. As such, the medicine wheel is a tool which can be incorporated as part of an autoethnographical approach to indigenous methods in research. The medicine wheel includes all of the aspects of a qualitative research paradigm – epistemology, axiology, methodology and ontology, as well as the self as the core. This core, for autoethnography, represents the self in the story of the research process.

Another element of the Indigenous methodology that I have developed throughout this project is the use of artistic expression as a means to dissecting data in order to create a shared understanding of process and perspective. As mentioned earlier, Regina, Saskatchewan is Treaty 4 land. The treaty document is available and has an accompanying pictography which was hand-drawn by Chief Paskwa, one of the signees, and gives a visual representation of the Treaty.

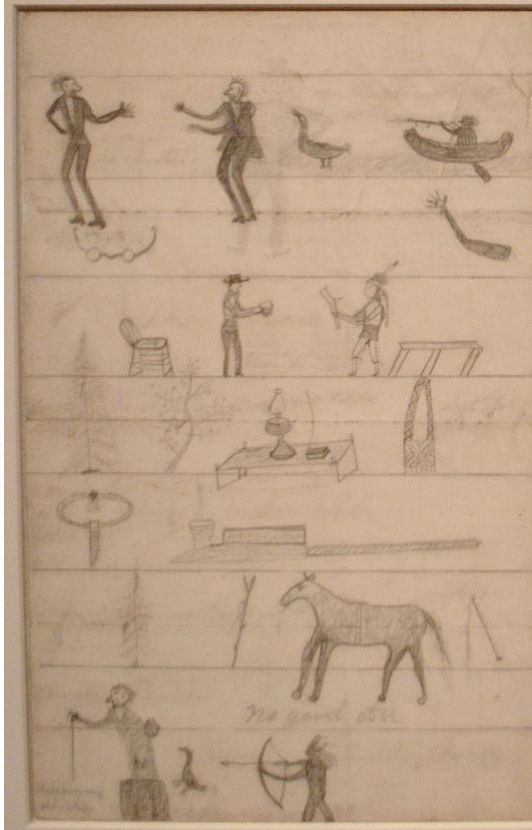


Figure 1(from the collection of the Royal Saskatchewan Museum)

In these negotiations, it was very unlikely that women would be included in a meaningful or obvious way. At the time, colonial norms and laws prohibited women from being involved in any political work, especially Indigenous women who were not defined as people according to the *Indian Act* (Brodsky 2014, 100-125). As a reaction to the authenticity of the Treaty agreement, I wrote a spoken word piece from the perspective of Indigenous matriarchs. In figures... and ...I also created a visual response to Chief Paskwa's pictograph and included Indigenous women and Thunderbird woman in the piece. Sherry's book *Art in Our Lives: Native Women Artists in Dialogue* shares artistic reflections and work related to identity and indigeneity and also highlights the validity of artistic research (Farrell-Racette, *This Fierce Love: Gender, Women, and Art Making* 2010).

4.3 Preamble to the Medicine Wheel

When I considered the need to design my own research paradigm, I asked myself many questions related to why I wanted to, and I needed to. Arvin, Tuck and Morrill argue that recognizing

Indigenous ways of knowing means that "... must recognize Indigenous peoples as the authors of important theories about the world we all live in" (Arvin, Tuck og Morrill 2013, 21). These reflections have guided my reasoning and work with creating a research paradigm represented by an Indigenous way of knowing, the medicine wheel. The teachings of the medicine wheel were oral stories for a long time. The increasing use of social media and the internet has mean that these stories have begun to be written down, researched and defined. As I was reading about all of the distinct medicine wheels on the internet and in books, I was overwhelmed by how many interpretations of the teachings had been written about. All of these localized definitions reminded me of the motion of the wheel, the fluidity of knowing and above all, the spectacular diversity supported by oral storytelling as a form of knowledge production. The different manifestations of the teachings of the medicine wheel represent stories passed on from person to person. This realization reminded me of the discussions I have had with Indigenous women in Saskatchewan about the definition of Indigenous feminism. Many of the women spoke about a local definition to fit the needs and perspectives of the community and an acceptance that other definitions also co-exist. This is also the case for the medicine wheel. I grew up with stories of the medicine wheel, in addition to reading about other teachings and later researching in even more detail about the teachings of the medicine wheel. I understood that I have a version of the medicine wheel which is the result of research stories and times. The stories I listened to over time have jumbled together and after the experiences of my field work in Saskatchewan, I realized that I have a right to share my version of the medicine wheel. The women I spoke with shared the common strength of telling their stories and being brave enough to inspire other women to do the same. Many of our conversations reflected on the power of our stories together and how our experiences provide the depth to maintain strength. The stories we tell are like threads, connecting individual experiences while forming a community of relationships. This kind of power is situated in the intersections of knowledge and the sharing of experiences. Storytelling is a form of validating experience as knowledge over time. Subsequently, this is my re-telling of the medicine wheel and the teachings which are represented in my research paradigm. Essentially, I wanted to include a knowledge system with which I was familiar and promote an Indigenous tool for dissecting ways and times for knowing.

4.4 The Medicine Wheel

In order to give a basis for understanding the relationship between myth in storytelling and sharing knowledge, I will share the legend of the Medicine Wheel here and give a short discussion of the elements of the story and their reflection in literature. This is one definition from an online source, *Four Directions Teachings*:

As Cree people, we were given the gift of being named for the four parts of human beings. Nehiyawak, we were called. It means being balanced in the four parts that are found in the four directions of the Medicine Wheel. These four parts for human beings are the spiritual, physical, emotional and mental aspects of the self. We need to try and balance these four parts that were given to us, to function as people. The fire is in the centre of the Medicine Wheel. That is where the meaning of the teachings comes from. For me this fire is also the self. When you look at the Medicine Wheel, you start from self. And as you look out, you make your circle. This is how the Medicine Wheel represents the life journey of people. The old people will tell you it is life itself. Look at the four seasons and follow the sun. Spring in the east, summer in the south, fall in the west and winter in the north. It tells the whole story of how all life came into being abundantly bright, rising in the east and then fading away as it moves west and north. All life rises and sets like the sun. What we do in between is our journey. This is where the gifts of the four directions are needed - the gifts of the spirit, physical body, emotions and mind - and where we need to find balance within these four realms (Lee 2006).

The First Nations University of Canada in Regina Saskatchewan further relates in their online booklet, *Four Directions Medicine Wheel Teachings*,

The Medicine Wheel at the First Nations University of Canada is the Four Directions Medicine Wheel envisioned for us by a female Elder from the Anishnabe Nation. This is but one Medicine Wheel, and since there are many Medicine Wheels, some people may see the wheel differently. For example, there are age Medicine Wheels, tribal Medicine Wheels, wheels for the four sacred plants (cedar, sage, tobacco and sweetgrass), the four seasons, the four aspects of the self (physical, mental, emotional and spiritual), and personal Medicine Wheels. These wheels each have different colours, placements and meanings. (Canada 2008)

The medicine wheel, therefore, provides a relational research platform, which highlights of the role of relating and sharing stories in the production of knowledge and for an Indigenous perspective in research (Chilisa 2012, 115-119). Here it is important to acknowledge the notion

of balance in the text. There is a need for thorough discussion of context and background in the thesis. This means that the front end of the thesis may seem to have more space than the stories and analysis. The medicine wheel provides an Indigenous perspective through which to understand how balance is related to the fluidity. The balance of the text is rightfully skewed towards the need for supporting space for the background and history related to the stories.

From this understanding of the story of the medicine wheel, I integrate the teachings of the medicine wheel with the intent of developing an Indigenous research paradigm. Again, my research process is influenced by Chilisa's words:

postcolonial indigenous research methodologies challenge conventional research methodologies and contribute to alternative methods of doing research that draw from indigenous knowledge systems and the philosophies and worldviews of colonized and historical oppressed societies (Chilisa 2012, 122).

Mary Smith also concludes in her article:

(i)n this regard, the auto ethnographer within the Indigenous context uses the self to decolonize research through explication and synthesis of their Indigenous values and ways of being that are inherent to the diverse cultural context in which they live. The auto ethnographer interprets the experience in relation to cultural values and epistemologies (M. Smith 2015, 5).

These passages encourage me to combine Indigenous philosophy with research and methodology. The words of Roxanne Bainbridge reflect my story as a connection to other Indigenous women's experiences. She writes that, "(t)he purposeful use of self, inherent in autoethnography, works to understand and interpret lived experience in the lives of others" (Bainbridge 2007, 6). She later continues, "(t)he practice of autoethnography potentially opens up possibilities for innovative ways, in which researchers, who are complete insiders, "may represent realities, themselves and their research participants in their texts" (Bainbridge 2007, 10). These concepts are part of my research paradigm where relationships, networks and stories contribute to space for understanding the experiences of Indigenous women. Roseann Martin, an Elder Advisor at the Native Women's Association of Canada explains, "(t)he Medicine Wheel is a very powerful tool once you know how to use it in everyday life. Life begins in the east and travels around throughout life and by the time we are at the end of our cycle we finally realize what our roles are supposed to be! We carry on the Teachings of our ancestors for the women to

lead by example and for the men to respect who we are and to walk side by side (NWAC, Native Women' Association of Canada Facebook page 2018).

4.5 Naming and names

I am a member of the community in which I research and write about. The people, communities and stories are relatives to me, and this relationship contributes to the development of more connections in our communities. Vine Deloria Jr's writes that everything in the natural world has relationships with every other thing and the total set of relationships makes up the natural world as we experience it (Deloria Jr 1999, 37). These words explain how relationships in Indigenous communities are built on networks of family and friends and that these networks reflect back on the individual and on the community. It is important to acknowledge relationships with respect and using first names is an important aspect of recognizing one another. Using first names is a sign of accepting and being accepted. It means that you are a part of that person's community and they are a part of yours. This is why the people that are a part of my thesis are referred to by first names. Part of Indigenous relationships is being accountable to people and communities. This is why using first names is a way to exemplify the notions of responsibility and respect involved with being a part of someone else's story.

5.0 Stories from the participants

Stories are a way of learning: learning about content, the storyteller and about ourselves as listeners. When listening to a story, it is possible to explore how people listen, the perspective and how that impacts what is heard or what knowledge comes out of the story. In this respect, I draw on the writings of Margaret Kovatch and specifically, her discussion of sharing knowledge through storytelling. Kovatch asserts that

(t)he conversational method is a means of gathering knowledge found within Indigenous research. The conversational method is of significance to Indigenous methodologies because it is a method of gathering knowledge based on oral story telling tradition congruent with an Indigenous paradigm. It involves a dialogic participation that holds a deep purpose of sharing story as a means to assist others. It is relational at its core (Kovach 2010, 40).

In this thesis, I focus on the stories of the participants, the women I consider to be Thunderbird Women in their communities. I interpret the story of Thunderbird Woman which I received from

Isaac as a means to define, through Indigenous stories, acts of leadership and strength by Indigenous women. The Indigenous women I worked with in my fieldwork helped to lead me on a diverse set of paths to education, and they have done this with many other people in their communities.

As a part of the Indigenous community, sharing conversations and stories as part of research is a balancing act. It is also an ethical act. Smith's discussion of "ethical research protocols" states "(f)rom Indigenous perspectives, ethical codes of conduct serve partly the same purpose as the protocols which govern our relationships with each other and with the environment" (L. T. Smith 2012, 120). I approach the concept of ethical research from this perspective of consent. For this reason, I am careful about how much to divulge and what parts to keep private. In this respect, I have been very aware of sharing my work with Stacey, Carol Rose and Sherry in order to ask for input and consent to share their inclusion. I shared the final thesis copy with all of the women and noted that as participants, they have the opportunity to approve or disapprove the sharing of our conversations and their stories. All of the women have approved my sharing of our conversations. In some areas, I have deliberately chosen not to go any deeper into the story in order to honor the "core Indigenous research values of respect, relevancy, reciprocity, and responsibility (Kovach 2010, 45).

In this section I share the experiences and stories from the time I spent with four Indigenous women: Stacey, Carol Rose, Sherry, and the time I spent at Camp Justice. I first observed photographs of Camp Justice for Our Stolen Children online through social media. The camp is organized and led by Indigenous women on the legislative grounds in Regina, Saskatchewan. The camp physically claimed a space to honor missing and murdered Indigenous youth. In addition, the camp drew attention to the negative impacts of the residential school experience and the 60's scoop. The women at the camp lead the camp participants in standing up for lost, stolen and abused children as a result of colonial impacts.

I spent 2 days at the camp. The first day I was welcomed by one of the camp matriarchs, who chose to remain unnamed here. She showed me the layout of the camp and the ceremonial tipi where they honoured the lives of Indigenous children who lost their lives to injustice, such as Colten Boushie and Tina Fontaine. The main tipi was in covered in photographs and posters honoring Indigenous children who lost their lives too early. The tipis in camp formed a protective circle around the center, where the women could feel safe and protected. In the tipi

with all of the ceremonial medicines such as sweetgrass and sage, I was overcome by a purely emotional reaction to their trauma and my understanding of that trauma and loss.

The second day I visited, I chose to observe the visitors and atmosphere of the camp without interacting. I sat on a bench near the opening to the camp and chatted with people as they came to visit the camp. I also talked with various volunteers and supporters about the importance of listening to the stories shared by the Indigenous women who lead the camp. Camp Justice for Our Stolen Children took form in early 2018. The name is a clear explanation of the group's goal and the perspective they are organized around. The physical act of taking space as a form of protest to highlight the stories of stolen and murdered Indigenous children, from a matriarchal perspective.

These stories are a combination of my experiences, observations and information shared through conversations with the participants. Participation in cultural activities provides personal experience in the form of observations combined with action. The act of engaging creates a form of analysis based on a perceived understanding of an activity and what the actual outcome is, on a personal level (Kovach 2010, 1-3). These kinds of data are analysed by utilizing memory, sensation and information in the form of communication. The give and take of data is fluid yet is documentable through summarizing conversations and sharing with participants to encourage contributions or more discussion to clarify (Rappaport 2008). In addition, participation has a way of cementing the knowledge in the physical world, and this type of knowing is reflected in the teachings of the medicine wheel and is part of approaching data with an Indigenous perspective. It is important to note that these stories are formulated through my point of view, as a researcher and as an indigenous person. Telling these stories is often difficult for several reasons. In one way, as an Indigenous researcher, it is too easy to be reminded of the previously discussed negative history of research on Indigenous peoples. In addition, the relationships and conversations feel private even though they all occurred in relation to my research and fieldwork. That means that none of the conversations were private or held in confidence, and instead, were understood to be a part of my research and writing. At the same time, the sharing of stories and personal knowledge feels intimate as well as part of a mutual give and take. For these reasons, I approach the telling of the stories carefully, and with respect. I share each of the stories of these four women below, along with my own. This telling forms the basis for the subsequent thematic analysis of the stories, and my experiences as a researcher through observation.

a) Stacey

Stacey Michelle Fayant is a Cree/Saulteaux, Métis and French artist from Regina, Saskatchewan. She is a vibrant person with dark curly hair, tattoos and piercings. Stacey exudes strength and an attitude of being able to do anything. Stacey is my sister. Our stories are intertwined in a special way. When we were younger, Stacey was chosen as a ‘gifted’ student. I am reminded of this in all of the knowledge she accumulates and the challenges she undertakes.

For a long time, our stories developed alongside one another. We, of course, have similar experiences from our family life and childhood. We are less than two years apart in age and have been close from the time Stacey was born. Our parents told us that when Stacey was born, I ran down the hospital corridor shouting that ‘I wanted to see my baby’. As kids, we had the same friend groups and we spent a lot of time together.

After high school, I went to university and started working. We still spent time together but had developed different friend groups. When I moved to Montreal, we went our separate ways for a while, although we were still close. After Montreal, I moved to Norway and daily life as well as the time difference took a toll on our connection.

In the time between as well, we had both found partners and had children. Our lives were busy, and we had little time to dedicate to long telephone conversations. After our dad passed away, we grew even further apart for a while, perhaps seeing the pain of one another being too much. I know for myself; I had a hard time seeing her grieve and I was not able to find a way to connect.

Stacey is a daughter, sister, niece, cousin, mother and partner. I would also describe her as a strong woman and artist and has taught herself many skills, which she incorporates in her work. Early on, Stacey taught herself how to felt wool and was invited by a local boutique to sell her scarves and hats. Stacey later moved onto learning Métis sash weaving, Cree/Métis beading and leather work as well as making Métis ribbon skirts. Recently Stacey became interested in traditional Indigenous tattoo practice and began to research the history of the art and current developments. In March of 2019, Stacey completed a residency with Earthline Tattoo Collective and is now a certified Indigenous tattoo practitioner in Regina, Saskatchewan. She is sharing her work with her community and her daughter.

The Earthline Tattoo Collective’s mandate states:

Earthline Tattoo Collective aims to enhance, expand, and support the work of traditional and cultural Indigenous tattoo practices across Canada. Earthline is committed to ensuring the health and safety of our communities through training and adhering to the highest standards. We are committed to ensuring the cultural safety of individuals and communities we work with through research, collaboration, design development, and creating awareness of the cultural Indigenous tattoo practices of Turtle Island. The collective is comprised of a dedicated team of cultural tattoo practitioners and visual artists: Jordan Bennett (Mi'kmaq), Dion Kaszas (Nlaka'pamux), and Amy Malbeuf (Métis) (Earthline Tattoo Collective 2017).

It is through Stacey's discovery of tattooing that our stories intersected again. I had, independently, researched Cree face tattoos. I had seen a few Indigenous women who had received various types of traditional tattoos or "markings" as they are called. I was drawn to the practice and had already begun to sketch ideas for my own tattoo when I learned of Stacey's new interest.

For my fieldwork, I visited Regina in the summer of 2018, and this is when I received my first tattoo from Stacey. She was still in the learning process and I gladly volunteered to be one of the people she learned on. I wanted to contribute in any way to her learning process, as well as support her as a sister. During the tattoo process, Stacey and I were able to share some old stories and, in this process, create a new facet to our story. Our conversations grew out of the purpose of my visit – the fieldwork and finding stories of Indigenous women's strength and leadership.

Stacey shared her knowledge of the history of the technique involved with Indigenous tattoo practice. She told me stories of how she first began with the practice, her research and the people she had met throughout. The act of sharing knowledge was solidified by the permanent nature of the artwork she gave to me. Visiting Stacey and observing her traditional tattooing practice revealed characteristics in her work such as focus on matriarchy, community building through physical bonding in the tattoo process, a desire to share her knowledge and art practice with other Indigenous women, independent research of Indigenous traditions in art and finally, a commitment to an indigenous perspective in education.

In Indigenous tattoo practice, a tattoo is a gift. The practice involves trust, respect and intimacy. Today, Indigenous tattooing is part of the process of healing from colonial traumas, a way for Indigenous people to visually reclaim and revitalize. The marks are meant to be a part of the person's story, a mark of knowledge and experience. This is the story Stacey shared with me.

b) Sherry

My first meeting with Sherry is at a coffee house in Regina. I arrive before her, and when she arrives, I immediately recognize her from her book covers. She has dark hair, eyes and glasses. She seems familiar which could be due to the research I have done on her biography or because she is an old friend of my dad's. Sherry is magnetic, friendly and exudes positivity as she sits down to chat with me. As a well-known artist and writer in Saskatchewan, she is especially recognized by the Métis people for her contributions to the community through her books and research. Her children's book, *The Flower Beadwork People*, expresses a visual identity of the Métis people, through their beading style. Sherry's books tell Métis stories through an understanding of the historical perspective. As a young Métis person, I came across Sherry's books and immediately felt a connection to the portraits and language. These stories were known to me through the stories my dad told.

Before I travelled home to do fieldwork, I contacted Sherry and asked if she would be willing to meet and chat. I told her a bit about my studies and was happy that she was very supportive. Later on, I shared with my mom how excited I was that Sherry was so kind and open to meet, and she told me that, of course Sherry would be kind, she knew my dad and his sisters. In fact, I would later learn from Sherry that she had taught a few of my aunts. The Métis community on the prairies is close knit and I should not have been surprised that Sherry and my dad knew each other. This was a part of his story I didn't have access to after he passed away, and during our conversations, Sherry was able to tell me many things about my dad, our family and the Métis community in general.

Again, the purpose of my visit gave a context to our conversations. Sherry and I touched upon many aspects of Indigenous gender issues and we discussed tradition versus colonial inheritance in Indigenous communities related to gender roles. Sherry expressed the notion that Métis women 'just get on with the work that needs to be done' and that this can be a perspective in tackling the issues related to negative impacts of the *Indian Act*. Sherry and I talked about how many Indigenous people are uncertain about cultural practice, ownership and the role of gender. In many cases, issues such as gender roles in drumming, singing and other ceremony can result in tension between men and women. Some women have grown up hearing other stories, less heard stories of women drumming, singing and being leaders before colonial impact. Other people feel that the protocol set out by elders and the Chiefs should be respected and not

questioned. Sherry and I talked about the confusion and how it is difficult to have one answer for all Indigenous communities. This means that the discourse is vitally important to creating a space for women's stories and experiences to be listened to and supported. There has to be a problem when there are so many stories of Missing and Murdered Indigenous women and still not enough action to address the issue.

Sherry's story also involves her work as a scholar. Sherry has taught at the University of Manitoba and the University of Regina, Saskatchewan. She recently released a book of articles called, *This Fierce Love: Gender Women and Art Making*, which includes perspectives on Indigenous feminism in art and expressions of cultural ownership by Indigenous women. This book reflects the diversity of stories reflected in the work of Indigenous women artists and creates a space for asking difficult questions related to gender.

On a more personal level, Sherry gave me stories of my dad and his family and our history as a Métis family. I consider these stories gifts and hold them close to my heart. They are private in the way they are given and memories which my sister and I can share. The stories of my dad will be given to my children and become a part of our ancestral narrative. For me, it is like an oral inheritance, a way to keep the act of Métis storytelling relevant and personal.

c) Carol Rose

Carol Rose is a writer, performer and storyteller. We met after my sister and I attended Carol's reading of a few of her poems from her poetry book, *Hiraeth*, noted previously. Carol is a striking figure with long, dark hair and colorful clothing. Carol's clothes, jewelry and makeup reflect her Indigenous identity with a combination of traditional and contemporary fashion. Carol is strong and inviting in the presentation of her work. I was inspired by her performance and bought her book after my sister introduced us. Stacey and Carol Rose had met and travelled together during their work with the Workshop Tour program with the Saskatchewan Exchange. Carol invited my daughters and I to come to her performances as part of the Regina Folk Festival and we agreed to make additional plans to visit her at her home in Regina Beach.

I went to my mother's house and read Carol's book. Through the reading and from our short conversation, I understood that Carol had been a child of a sixties scoop style adoption. The sixties scoop is a reference to the now known practice of social services in many cities, to intervene in Indigenous births and adopt out Indigenous children to non-Indigenous families and

communities. Often, these children were not informed of their Indigenous ancestry until many years later. As aptly described in the Canadian news media: “these children lost their names, their languages, and a connection to their heritage. Sadly, many were also abused and made to feel ashamed of who they were (CBC News 2018). Many of Carol’s poems reflect her experience as an adopted Indigenous child in a “white” home. In addition, her poems reflect the strength of overcoming loss and trauma, and how her experience informs her views on gender relations in her community.

When we visited Carol’s next performances, we witnessed how Carol has turned her feeling of cultural loss into a strength through revitalizing the Indigenous knowledge. Carol’s concert for children included using well-known childhood songs such as the “Insy winsy spider” with the Cree language and drumming. Carol also shared her knowledge of different Indigenous drums and drumming styles with the audience and encouraged all to participate in the drumming, singing and dancing.

As promised, my daughters and I were invited to join Carol at her home in Regina Beach for a cookout. We met Carol at one her performances and she gave us a ride to her home. Carol showed us her paintings and her workspace. She instantly became a friend the girls and I, as we were welcomed like family members. Carol told me about how she works with the loss and trauma of her childhood by reclaiming and redefining her identity. Carol shared stories which were similar in themes involving the confusion of Indigenous gender roles and the question of tradition or colonial inheritance. In addition, Carol is a mother and this theme comes through in her work. Her poetry touches on concepts related to motherhood and the strength of matriarchy for Indigenous communities.

d) Me

Now is the right time to present who I am as, author and researcher of this work. I am a Métis/Cree artist born and raised in Regina, Saskatchewan. I graduated from university with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in film production. My art practice has developed to include working with pastels, acrylic paint and installation pieces. The themes in my artwork revolve around identity, storytelling and power. I am also a mother, a wife, a sister, a daughter, an aunt and a friend, just to name a few of the parts of who I am to others and myself. My husband and I moved to Norway almost 15 years ago. I have since been motivated by the change and also addition of

another facet to my identity - immigrant. Being without a historical connection to the land in Norway is a part of travelling and moving, yet it is a transition and ongoing process.

Like my sister, I have dark curly hair, dark eyes and glasses. Some people say I look my dad and some people say I look like my mom. I have traditional tattoos from my sister including the face tattoo she gave me during fieldwork. My story comes last because it is one that I have waited the longest to write. I have delayed or procrastinated pointing the focus at myself and my story, even though my story is what connects all of our stories. The one commonality in all the stories I have presented so far is my presence. I have had control in sharing other people's stories and in the presentation of stories shared with me. In many instances, I have thought it would be fairer to have the women write their stories of me instead, give them the editorial control of sharing their own experiences with me. This is how I view fieldwork, as a give and take, where I must show not just feel humble. In my work, letting go of the ego and opening a space for respectful sharing is an important part of informing my research paradigm. Therefore, it makes sense that I want to bring that type of perspective into my story as a way of balancing my ego and sharing space.

I grew up in Regina, Saskatchewan, just like my sister. There are less than two years between us in age, so we have shared a good part of our life story through our childhood. The benefit of telling my story is that I can go into a bit more detail about my experiences and know that they are mine to share.

I have always loved music and art, which were a part of our childhood. We would paint with watercolors on the windows to welcome the seasons and holidays. Our home was filled with the art we made and shared. It was also a difficult place. We grew up watching the difficult development of my dad's alcoholism and how it was related to his residential school experience in addition to other multitudes of colonial trauma, such as being beaten by the police and watching family members perish from drug and alcohol problems. When Dad was drinking, he could sometimes muster the courage to talk about his residential school experience, but not in great detail. This is something I feel divided about still – the bliss in not knowing his traumatic experience and the need to know his traumatic experience. In addition, we grew up between being Métis and Cree. Dad was against treaty status and spoke a lot about Métis traditions. Yet he also shared Cree traditions with us, and the Cree identity was also a part of who he was.

My father survived a residential school experience, and the rest of his life was negatively impacted by his experience and the losses he suffered. I grew up watching him yearn for his language, his identity and his traditions. The partial memories of the abuse at the school affected his daily life, his self-image and his self-esteem. He carried the legacy of shame imparted to him in that school and struggled to overcome the death of his *inner Indian child*. At the same time, my father was proud to be Métis and Cree. He managed to share positive experiences with through visits to the land and sharing as much traditional knowledge as he could remember and connect with. As with many Métis people of the 1970's and 1980's, my family often drove out to Lebret, Saskatchewan and the Qu'Appelle valley to visit and be "on the land" and share a familial, cultural connection (Cardinal 2002, 69). However, as I grew older, the visits became less frequent as my father fell deeper into alcoholism. In my teen years, I was very confused about what it meant to be Métis and Cree. I had vague memories of my dad trying to give us the gifts of traditional stories and knowledge.

A large part of my life is focused on what it means to be Métis or to be Cree and how I can be a combination of the two cultures. What does it mean to be Indigenous? Historically speaking, there was often a strong cultural and ancestral link between Métis and Cree families in Saskatchewan, so it makes sense that this identity dichotomy still impacts the connections I have had to our cultural heritage. The impacts of experiencing loss and trauma in connection with my culture led me to begin sharing the stories that I knew about residential schools and loss related to colonial impacts. This background informed my perspective and relationship to my studies and the formation of my master thesis. There was never any doubt that I wanted to contribute to discussions about the legacy of the *Indian Act* and the continuation of disrupting Indigenous gender relations. To this day, the *Indian Act* creates a gender bias which prefers male descendants. This scheme contributes to the loss of indigeneity in future generations, where many women will be discounted as members of their own communities. I had hoped to one day gain status for the sole reason of passing it on to my daughters so that they might be able to visit our land and family when they are older. However, this is not a possibility to me and even if I did get my own status, it would be for my step-grandfather's reserve and not my grandmother's. This reality was shocking and continues to be a difficult truth to accept.

It is for this reason that I want to open up a space for the women who have impacted my life and those I have met in the course of my fieldwork. It feels right that one woman – Stacey -

has been a part of my story the whole way, one woman – Sherry – was a part of my story through my dad and we are now reconnected through our work, and one woman – Carol Rose- became a friend because of this research and my sister. Our stories combine and intertwine, variously supporting and sharing with one another. We are all connected just as Vine De Loria said, “(w)e are related” (Deloria Jr 1999, 36-37).

6.0 Analysis

In this section, I analyze the information from the conversations in the research field, as well as examine how those stories are reflected in the various work practice of the women I spoke with and observed. I analyze the information based on the tradition of thematic narrative analysis. Riessman’s early writings on narrative analysis explain, “(s)tory telling, to put the argument simply, is what we do with our research materials and what informants do with us” and “(n)arrative analysis takes as its object of investigation the story itself”(1-3) (Riessman 1993, 1-3). Writing about narrative inquiry, Webster and Mertova state that it “is set in human stories of experience. It provides researchers with a rich framework through which they can investigate the ways humans experience the world depicted through their stories” (Webster and Mertova 2007, 1). Through active listening to stories, it is possible to locate connections between experiences. Therefore, I discuss connections in the data based on themes related to the negative impacts of colonialism, the response to those negative impacts and the result of reclaiming Indigenous identity and methods of cultural revitalization. This includes the traditional work of Stacey, the poetry of Carol Rose, the academic writings by Sherry and the experience at Camp Justice. In addition, I explore how these experiences have influenced me, and my relationship to my identity. Analysing stories, relationships and experiences is much different than analysing impersonal data such as statistics and trends. As an Indigenous researcher, it is difficult to forget the harmful history of research and especially the notion of analysis. For this reason, I approach analysis integrating an Indigenous concept of *being related* to my research and to the data, thereby ensuring that I have a duty to honour the data and the gift of knowledge (Deloria Jr 1999, 36-37).

6.1 Confused Gender Relations: Negative Impacts of Colonialism

The legacy of the *Indian Act*, as detailed in previous chapters, has meant that Indigenous women have experienced the erasure of their identities through Canadian legislation. This led to a disruption in gender relations and confusion in how to address and cope with the changes. One example of this is the theme of uncertainty related to Indigenous gender traditions in ceremony. This kind of insecurity means that many Indigenous women are questioning the roots of patriarchy in our cultural traditions. Some of us have grown up with some ideas of gender, which are now being challenged. For instance, I asked Sherry her thoughts on the protocol in some communities that women should not drum on the big drum. She shared with me the story of the big drum, and how it is a story revolving around a woman giving the drum as a gift. The story speaks of the drum being given first to the woman by the Great Spirit, who tells her to share it with men to create peace between warring nations. In this way, the drum is often seen as possessing a feminine spirit and shares a likeness to Mother Earth who is thus treated with care and respect. As well, the drum sound is often said to be the heartbeat of Mother Earth in myths (Van den Berg 2019).

Perhaps, in the context of that story, women were not drumming, and it was a call to Indigenous men. However, does that mean that the Creator intended for women to abstain from drumming forever and under all circumstances? Sherry and I discussed the legacy of the *Indian Act* and how it is difficult to come to a final answer on the issue of gender relations in Indigenous communities. Yet, it is vital that the questions be asked and that the Indigenous women who dare to tell new stories are afforded a space to redefine their own agency. The reality is that we can now choose to add to the drumming legacy and include our women – the grandmothers, mothers, daughters and sisters who we have a right to honor. This notion for me, means that we can show autonomy in the reclaiming of gender balance in our cultural traditions. We do know that women are valued in the Cree/Métis worldviews and thus, we can support the dissemination of stories of matriarchy in our communities.

When Stacey and I spoke about the history of Indigenous tattooing, I asked her about perspectives on gender in the tradition. For instance, was it performed by either men or women? What were the protocol related to the practice in terms of rights to design and give a tattoo? These are a few of the questions I asked Stacey and she shared with me she had found some stories which stated that in earlier times, only an elder who had received the tattoo in a dream

could give a traditional tattoo and that some stories related that women's participation was based on where she was in her menstrual cycle. However, Stacey noted that many of these stories are based on colonial journals and not on actual evidence from Indigenous people or their communities. After Stacey attended the Earthline Tattoo Collective's school, Stacey confirmed that from what she had learned, most of the information that can be found on the historical nature of Indigenous tattooing comes from a colonial perspective, and as with the premise of the *Indian Act*, Indigenous women and their stories were invisible and did not have a place in the notes the colonial explorers were taking for their documentation. Most of the documents are journals written by explorers, traders and governmental employees. None of these men had an interest in recognizing Indigenous women.

Another example of the disruption in gender relations can be seen in Carol Rose's poem, *Black Dog* from her poetry book *Hiraeth*. The poem begins with, "*Slummin it, I see? / refers to me/ Normalized dysfunction/ even he can make me feel small/ taught to believe that our women have no worth at all*" (pg. 53) This quote shows that the author feels an uncertainty and frustration in relation to how she is treated. As well, she refers to the man being taught a way of viewing women that is not in keeping with what she knows. The author continues later with, "so/ before you ask her why she did not leave? / ask him/ why he hit her? / putting the heart of a woman/ on the ground" (Daniels 2018, 53).

Again, Carol Rose refers to the innate value of the woman and also her heart. The author's matter-of-fact voice supports the idea that she is sharing cultural knowledge and wonders why the man does not possess the same knowledge. Finally, at the end, the author concludes by sharing the teaching that seems to be underlying her questions to the man. "HE DOG, Oglala Sioux: *It is well to be good to women in the strength of our manhood because we must sit under their hands at both ends of our lives*" (Daniels 2018, 53). This lesson points to the value of building strong relationships with women as a woman's power is linked to the nature of her role. She is both the creator and caretaker in this poem, which means that for Indigenous men, Indigenous women are their connection to birth, life and death. The last part of the poem seems to conclude that the woman will be the one who is present at the end of the man's life and one can wonder if this means as the Creator or as the one caring for the man before he dies. Whichever is meant in the teaching, it is certain that the meaning is for Indigenous men to value

and care for their relationship with Indigenous women and to acknowledge their position in their communities.

6.2 Trauma and Loss: Negative Impacts of Colonialism

Many Indigenous people's lives have been impacted by trauma and loss due to the effects of the *Indian Act*, and later, the *Residential School Act*. Through the implementation of these laws, Indigenous women especially, lost their legal rights to their land and culture as well as their right to raise their children. The *Indian Act* legislated Indigenous women's access to their family and land. In fact, the Indigeneity of women was defined by their husband or father's status. This resulted in the disruption of matrilineal connections and in a physical sense, meant that many Indigenous women and their children were unable to reside on their territorial land. This disconnection is a loss not only of land, but of the possibility to hear the stories and learn the information which comes from the land and from a connection to family. In some cases, it also meant a loss of language which make reconnection between generations more challenging.

The Residential School system was legislated locally, and all Indigenous children were required to attend from 1920. Indigenous mothers became unable to care for and raise their children in their traditional ways. More importantly, Indigenous parents were not able to protect their children from the destructive mandate of the schools. In 1920, Duncan Campbell, Deputy Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs of the Dominion of Canada, made remarks to the Special committee on the *Indian Act* and he stated:

I want to get rid of the Indian problem... That has been the whole purpose of Indian education and advancement since the earliest times. One of the very earliest enactments was to provide for the enfranchisement of the Indians. So it is written in our law that the Indian was eventually to become enfranchised. ... Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department, that is the whole object of this Bill (First Nations Steering Committee n.d.).

Indigenous mothers not only had to give their children to an unknown system, they were also unable to do anything to change the law or the way the schools were designed. The loss of their own children's language and culture, before their eyes would have been a traumatic experience. This trauma was further disseminated in the physical and sexual abuse of Indigenous students by authority figures at the schools and many children ran away from the schools.

However, this was usually futile, and if the child did not die from the journey, if found, they would be sent back to the school. If the family hid the child, they would face repercussions from the government. All of these stories have been passed on from residential school survivors and parents of residential school survivors and confirm the horror that these generations lived with and through. Coping mechanisms which often arise from pain, such as alcoholism and more broadly, depression are prevalent for sufferers of trauma and many Indigenous families have a connection in some way to these effects of the residential school system. There have been several studies recently which point to how trauma is shared in families and with future generations.

For my dad, the loss of language and the trauma he experienced as a child resulted in a lifelong dependence on alcohol and a tendency towards self-destruction. He explained to me many times, that if he could have stopped drinking, he would have. The problem was that his trauma had resulted in the inability to love himself. As a child, watching my dad struggle with these effects of colonialism, I also became affected in my relationship to my identity. I always felt that if he didn't know who he was, how can I know who I am? In addition to his loss of self, my dad's life was a rollercoaster of pain and loss. Many of his family members and friends died due to their own struggles with the after-effects of a residential school experience or effects of the Indian Act. My dad mourned family members year after year and this became an ongoing struggle. I grew up with a true understanding of how the negative impacts of colonialism are still being mapped and explained. The *Indian Act*, the Residential school act and other colonial laws are still leaving imprints on Indigenous youth today due to the long-lasting effects of destabilizing family and community relationships.

Carol Rose experienced an alienating adoption by a non-indigenous family, and this also resulted in a feeling of loss related to her cultural heritage. In her poem, "Sickness", Carol Rose writes, "Hate/ permeates/ runs through the veins like vinegar/ laced with coarse sand/ too many slaps across the head/ causes brain damage/ as in breaking will confidence hope/ words pierce/ *stupid son-of-a-bitch/ Contemptuous foster child you are told*" (Daniels 2018, 29). This quote relates the negative self-view that taught to her as a child. From the experience described in the poem, the author has learned that she has no value. In another poem, *Unravelling Threads*, Carol Rose writes, "Call yourself a mother? / yet/ could never bring yourself/ to hold/ this little brown hand/ in public/ always qualifying/ with the worlds/ *she's adopted* (Daniels 2018, 3). Again, the sentiment in the poem related to the authors identity reveals that there is a part of her identity

which her adoptive mother is embarrassed about. Later in the poem, Carol Rose shares what the neighbours would think “*oh they better watch out/ those Indians are nothing but trouble/ will probably be hooker by the time she’s 12/ don’t let your kids play with her/ she probably has lice they all do you know*” (Daniels 2018, 3). From these words, it is apparent that the author experienced degradation and racism related to her Indigenous identity. In this way, Carol Rose a sense of loss and sadness in how her culture was viewed by her adoptive family and adoptive community. Instead of feeling the joy in connection and in relationships, the poems shared here present a perspective on the negative impacts losing access to culture and pride in identity.

6.3 Loss of Identity and Insecurity related to Cultural Practice: Negative Impacts of Colonialism

A significant part of identity is related to connections to culture, language family and community. As detailed above, loss of language, land and family connection have been one of the results of the *Indian Act* legislation. By limiting the rights of Indigenous women, the government has been able to ensure that in the future there will be fewer status Indigenous people.

As discussed, reducing legal cultural connections guarantees that there will be fewer Indigenous people who will be able to speak their language and share the stories of their ancestors, which are often related to the land. As I shared earlier, my dad’s trauma related to his Indigenous identity limited what he could share with me and my family. For myself, this created uncertainty, a feeling of not knowing enough about my own culture. More than that, the confusion of always wondering, am I Métis or Cree or a combination? As a child and young adult, I reflected on my lack of Indigenous status, lack of a reserve and lack of the Cree and Métis languages. I wondered what it meant to ‘be Indigenous’ if I had little access to the traditional heritage of my people. In order to move beyond uncertainty, it is necessary to recognize that a part of my journey is shifting the perspective from what is missing, to what can be reclaimed.

Another example of insecurity related to culture comes from Stacey’s story. Stacey shared her feeling of uncertainty of the right to tattoo when she first began researching the practice. Stacey expressed that because she did not grow up knowing about the art, she was unsure if she was ‘Indian’ and therefore allowed to learn the practice. This feeling of not being ‘Indian’ enough can be seen from the perspective of experiencing a break in cultural autonomy.

Our father felt a loss in his connection to his cultural identity and he passed this feeling on to my sister and I. We had a hard time knowing who we were due to his insecurity and inability to share his culture with us. For that reason, many of the Cree and Métis traditions that we have learned have been from other sources. Reclaiming not only involves finding the knowledge but having the courage to believe in the right to own and use the knowledge.

Not growing up on a reserve nor having status has led to me feeling disconnected from my Indigenous family and cultural traditions. This break or loss often results in a sense of not properly belonging and can contribute to lateral violence in Indigenous communities as discussed in Weimer's online article. Weimer explains, "(t)he effects of lateral violence run deep, as deep as first contact with settlers, imposing their cultural beliefs as superior on Anishinaabe cultural practices, belittling them as worthless. Intergenerational effects of Residential Schools, the Indian Act and Canada's other policies can all contribute to lateral violence" (Weimer 2017). Ultimately, the definitions of Indigenous people as status or non-status is a colonial tool used to separate Indigenous people and communities. The practice of forming hierarchies of people related to identity is a colonial way of assigning value to the continuation of the system. By providing minor advantages to some groups of Indigenous people through status for instance, the government opens a space for the growth of lateral violence and anger related to Indigenous identity. Those who cannot have status may resent those who do not have status, and those who have status may feel a need to protect the definition of status to protect their connection to their identity.

Stories of the Road Allowance People, by Sherry Farrell-Racette and Maria Campbell, is an example of how Indigenous stories are located in the land and how the Métis had to regroup after they lost their access to land. The illustrations, stories and language used reflect the unique culture of the Road Allowance Métis people. This community of Métis families mainly in Saskatchewan who had to temporarily settle on land kept free for the government to use as roads at some point. Due to the impermanent nature of these Métis settlements, often the only connection Métis families have to their history is through oral storytelling. Campbell relates, "(t)his was the first snowfall and the first night of storytelling in the little road allowance village... people would make room for the visitor, who would lean forward and become a part of our circle" (Campbell and Sherry 1995, foreword). Sherry and Maria not only share stories and artwork, they address the loss of cultural heritage that the Métis suffered due to the negative

impacts of colonialism. The Métis were not given access to their traditional lands and this resulted in a disconnection among early Métis settlements. These kinds of stories show the ways that Indigenous people have been disenfranchised through colonial definitions of identity and rights connected to identity.

In addition, for many Indigenous people another part of the self-doubt related to cultural identity is the loss of language. Due to colonialism, access to Indigenous languages is also limited. Many elders and others who speak the language live in isolated or rural communities. This means that learning the language is not as easy as signing up for a class. For myself, a large part of my insecurity related to my identity is my inability to speak my Indigenous languages. I grew up in the city, and we did not belong to a reserve. My exposure to any Indigenous language was limited to the few cultural events we were a part of, such as pow wows and family reunions. Some of my cousins had a different status than me and this meant that their language abilities were often more advanced than my own. This difference was enough for me to grow up feeling disconnected and with a longing to gain knowledge of the Cree and Métis languages. Not only was it a feeling of disconnection, but also a feeling of not belonging and of not being ‘Indian’ enough to identify as such.

6.4 Response to Negative Impacts

At the camp, I observed a community of mother, grandmothers, and children all working together to contribute to the daily running of the camp. Indigenous men were asked to contribute as security and odd jobs, and they were made to understand the women were in charge. The women at the camp share that reclaiming a space for their children’s stories is their way of reacting to the injustice of the legal system. Through their leadership and discussion, the women at the camp opened a space an Indigenous perspective to law and justice by telling the stories of the loss of Indigenous children (Camp Justice for our Stolen Children 2018).

My participation at Camp Justice for Our Stolen Children included visiting the camp and staying with the people there. We walked the grounds, read the protest signs, and spent time in the tipis that the women lived in while at camp. The women who led the camp occupied space on the land, carving out their own place to speak to the colonial government. The ceremony in the camp was evident from first entering. The entrance to the clearing on the legislative grounds is narrow enough that it feels like a gateway. The tipi camp was set up in a circle as a way to

protect the women and children from outside interference during their private time. The outer areas of the camp were free places for people to sit and talk, and to the side a table was set up for food preparation. A small tent beside the table housed more cooking supplies.

Walking into the camp felt sombre as the signs about lost Indigenous children were arranged at the entrance. Immediately, it was clear that this was a place for remembering, ceremony and tradition. At the same time, the people at camp were welcoming and we saw that all who visited were greeted with warmth and usually hugs. The experience of bonding was immediate and welcoming against the experiences of trauma and loss, which informed of the development of the protest camp. As well, the leaders of the camp were women and this experience contributed to recognition of the need to include matriarchs as leaders. The ceremonies connected to the four sacred medicines were held in one of the tipis, and when I stood in that tipi, I felt the power of the past and reclamation of traditions. Camp Justice is an experience that solidified my understanding of the necessity of opening a space for rematriating Indigenous governance through including mothers and matriarchs.

Indigenous tattoo practice serves many functions from decoration, storytelling and can be a cure for trauma and loss. When I visited with Stacey to talk about receiving an Indigenous tattoo, she shared with me how she has incorporated the art into her own journey of healing. In my view, the practice of Indigenous tattooing is about having the autonomy to decide how I express my culture. Often, Indigenous people are subject to labelling and defining, and it can be positive to have the ability to choose tattoo markings instead of oppressive societal stereotypes about Indigenous cultures.

In addition, Stacey explained her experiences with body modification in coping with trauma and loss. The power of having the ability to control pain is also a way in dealing with pain. Stacey commented in a news interview, “tattooing can be healing for people dealing with grief or trauma. In our hearts, we know that that type of practice, that type of body modification does something for us in that moment of pain and change” (S. Fayant 2019). She goes on to express that she feels a responsibility to share this tradition with other Indigenous artists. In the interview, one of the founders of Earthline Tattoos, Dion Kaszas reveals, “it has been a bit burdensome to carry the weight and responsibility of the cultural practice. He feels a sense of relief that others, like Fayant, are now helping to spread the healing practice. We always say dot

by dot and line by line, you know, we reconnect ourselves together and to the earth" (S. Fayant 2019).

This relationship between the body and mind was a part of my experience as Stacey tattooed me. For example, the physical aspects of the experience brought forth thoughts related to relationships, cultivating relationships and building intimacy and trust. The tattooing process is long and involved. In order to counter this type of discomfort, both parties involved must trust one another and give in to the physical experience. As well, the tattooing mostly takes place in the artist's home or another relaxing environment. The tattooing usually occurs at someone's home. Tea and coffee are made, there is conversation, as well as contact. This is opposed to a commercial tattoo experience where there is little communication and very little contact.

Indigenous tattooing is an educational experience in tradition, cultural symbols and art practice. The bonds formed in tattooing are carried over into other parts of the community, as Vine Deloria writes, "we are all related" (Deloria Jr 1999, 1-3). I interpret this to mean we as in all people and all experiences. The skills we receive through traditional experiences are transferable to all parts of life.

Carol Rose was not raised speaking her language or practicing Indigenous culture, but she educated herself and shares that knowledge and strength with her audience. She also has changed her name to an Indigenous name which reflects the notion of reclaiming through practice. Carol Rose's use of her language reflects her desire to redefine her indigeneity on her terms and through her perspective. Recently, Carol Rose changed her last name to GoldenEagle to reflect her right to name herself as an Indigenous woman. The poem, *Returning*, speaks to the importance of hearing stories and how they can remind us of connections to our identities prompted by memory. In the poem Carol writes, "(a)t this kitchen table they laugh/ my wonderful sisters/ (nimis)/ telling stories/ pointing with their lips" (Daniels 2018, 97). This relates how sharing memories and stories provides a mode of sharing both cultural identities and the repetition of the stories provides a relationship to the community- we know the stories of the communities, large and small, that we are a part of. Carol later writes, on pg.98, "I cry for real because/ (paapiwak)/ prompts vague memories buried in my cells/ to remember" (Daniels 2018, 98).

This signifies the physical part of knowing and remembering as well as to how a cultural connection is reinforced in all parts of the self, as is taught in the medicine wheel (Lee 2006).

Carol concludes that she was “robbed by circumstance/ but (paapiwak) my sisters and sitting at this kitchen table right now/ is my chance/ and I embrace” pg.98. This part of the poem reflects back to Carol’s loss, at an early age, of her cultural identity and sense of ownership over belonging to Indigenous communities. Carol points to the importance of the people- her sisters- and place- the kitchen table- which signifies the value of relating to peoples and places in the search for reclaiming cultural autonomy.

6.5 Owning, sharing and learning as a result of the negative impacts of colonial governance

Sherry has dedicated her work to telling Métis stories. Her writing is informed by research, including listening to stories from the community. In addition, Sherry is a scholar, and, in this capacity, she has the possibility to share her knowledge with a wide audience, and she is able to open space for inquiry related to Métis traditions and identity.

Sherry quotes Jeanette Armstrong at the beginning of her article, “*This Fierce Love*”: *Gender, Women, and Art Making*,

It is the fierce love at the centre of our power that is the weapon our grandmothers gave us, to protect and to nurture against all odds. Compassion and strength are what we are, and we have translated these into every area of our existence because we have had to. And we must continue to do so.... Let this be known as a truth to all, so that we might all come through the world once more in balance and harmony. I pray for that and struggle for that, for my great-grandchildren to come. To you Aboriginal women out there, to you survivors. I congratulate you, I encourage you, I support you and I love you (pg. 27).

Sherry’s book, “The Flower Beaded People” is an example of empowerment through reclaiming identity. The story and illustrations focus on Métis identity, and connects the Métis community through her dissemination of Métis history, in addition to cultivating a shared visual interpretation of the Métis identity. The bonds she creates through her writing are based on recognizing the history and places of the Métis people. For her community, this is vital to reclaiming their physical land and redefining their identity. In addition, Sherry writes about the value of Métis women in their communities and the importance of matriarchy in leadership roles. The experience of having an intellectual connection with Sherry’s work indicates that academic contributions are another way of sharing knowledge and working with ways of knowing.

Sherry's article in *Art in Our Lives, This Fierce Love*, is a scholarly discussion of how Indigenous women have shown agency in their lives historically, and how Indigenous women artists challenge the objectification of Indigenous women and confront the colonial gaze (Farrell-Racette, *This Fierce Love: Gender, Women, and Art Making* 2010, 28-29). Sherry also argues that we as Indigenous scholars and researchers have to be careful that our own work and study does not continue the trend of objectification (Farrell-Racette, *The Flower Beadwork People* 1991, 30).

Sherry also discusses the marginalization of Indigenous women's work in relation to art exhibitions. She concludes that women are not as widely represented as they should be. There are enough women and they are producing, yet there is a barrier to the dissemination of that work (Farrell-Racette 2010, 50). This can also be a problem in academia, where Indigenous women are not well-represented historically, many of whom have been writing for many decades such as Lee Maracle and Maria Campbell. In addition, it is easy to wonder why so many male Indigenous scholars have gained permanent places in many academic curricula, while there are many Indigenous women who have yet to be given more space in educational institutions. In this respect, the push for colonial heteropatriarchy meant that the government had to find a way to address the Indigenous women's place in their communities. Sherry explains:

(t)he location of female power was related to the reproduction of the family and through the family to reproduction of the sovereign nation. Female domains of property and authority further enhanced it. There is considerable evidence to suggest that women's power constituted a significant barrier to colonization, resulting in the considerable energy devoted towards breaking Indigenous nations into small family units that could be more easily controlled and manipulated" (Farrell-Racette 2010, 34).

Carol's performances and poetry readings provide a connection to the Indigenous community in Regina through her reclaiming of her connection to the Cree language, Cree music and Indigenous instruments. She encourages participation and the sharing of cultural traditions. She educates while entertaining and is open to sharing stories.

Carol Rose invited me to watch her performances, which are also open for participation. The first performance I attended was for children at a folk festival. Here Carol used Cree words in well-known children's songs and encouraged all in the audience to drum with her. She shared stories of Cree origin in a modern way, with recognizable melodies. Participating in the singing and the drumming reinforced my connections to my culture as well as sharing stories and

knowledge with the greater community. The experience of dancing and communicating Cree traditions together with Carol and the audience brought a sense of bonding through culture.

In addition, Carol Rose writes about Indigenous women's encounters with sexism, violence and loss. Her words express an explicit knowledge of Indigenous women's strength. I witnessed a poetry reading by Carol Rose and although I did not directly participate, as an Indigenous woman, I felt a bond to her words and the truth she communicated.

In her poem, *Angel Wings*, Carol Rose writes about the strength of female voices in stories of overcoming loss and trauma. In the poem, Carol Rose shares a memory of her painful experiences as a 15-year-old Indigenous and relates that experience to the stories of missing and murdered Indigenous women such as Tine Fontaine. Carol Rose writes, "the water is red/the blood of hatred/ the River filled with tears/ the news breaks my heart/ and take me back/ to my own youth/too many similarities" (Daniels 2018, 20). She describes her experience as a youth of being "struck in the face" and that "there were witnesses... in their silence/they condone" (Daniels 2018, 20). However, at the end of poem, Carol Rose shares a hopeful view of the current developments in Indigenous women's strength when she writes, "so now/ 36 years later/ on this 18th day/ and a 15-year-old girl is dead/ no one stands silent/ No! No More! /Sisters speak out/ our voices awaken the land" (Daniels 2018, 20). These words point to the chorus of Indigenous women speaking up and out.

Through the process of conducting academic research, my spoken word and artwork has been influenced by the concept of Indigenous women's stories throughout history, distant and recent. I have also been inspired to reflect on the aspects of the medicine wheel through spoken word and poetry. The influence of listening to Stacey, Carol's and Sherry's stories has also solidified my desire to tell my dad's residential school story, the story of MMIW (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Women and Girls 2018) and to lift up the stories of strong Indigenous women in our Saskatchewan communities. A significant part of co-producing knowledge from fieldwork includes incorporating artistic process in academic research to produce knowledge from an indigenous perspective. As an artist, my reflections often take the form of a painting, a poem or a video. These artistic forms reflect the research impressions which come out of sharing knowledge and reclaiming Indigenous identity, such as receiving traditional tattoos or finding knowledge in oral stories.

In addition, I utilize writing as a method for reflection and a mode to locate myself as an Indigenous researcher. As such, my research reflections took the form of a spoken word piece detailing a journey into the story of the medicine wheel, a speech from the perspective of Indigenous women at the time of the treaties and a pictograph including Indigenous women in the treaty negotiations (A. Fayant 2019). This piece illustrates the notion of responding to male Indigenous leaders from the past. This reflection allows for space to question the gendered aspect of negotiations and agreements between Indigenous communities and the colonial government.

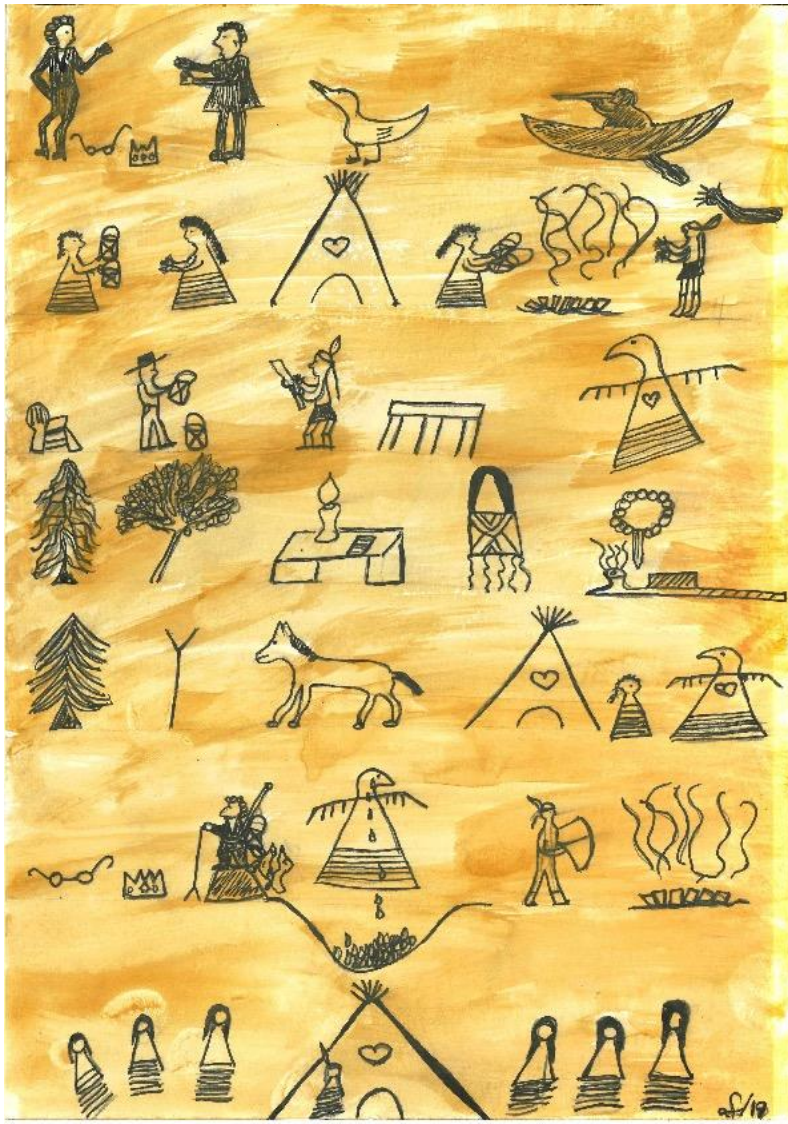


Fig. 2 (author's collection)

The Indigenous tradition of tattoo art is what brought Stacey and I together in terms of defining our Indigenous identities. I had a strong desire to be a part of bringing back the

traditional arts of our communities, and I also wanted to provide an example of expressing my inner Indigenous identity. Stacey, also shared this interest and educated herself on the historical practice of giving a traditional tattoo and the current developments in traditional tattoo art.

It was therefore natural that my sister should be the one to give me my ‘markings’ as they are known in Indigenous terms. First, the physical act of tattooing helped me to outwardly express the inner feeling of my Indigenous identity. In addition, the history of the meaning behind the markings connected me, in both a physical and mental sense, to a feeling of belonging to the whole history of Indigenous identity.

Stacey works through claiming a relationship to the Indigenous culture, whether it’s through Métis beadwork and leatherwork or Indigenous tattoo practice. Stacey imparts the act of ownership to the culture with her daughter and other youth. Stacey has visited communities and shared her work with Indigenous people. It takes bravery to stand up and take possession of cultural identity and to confront the uncertainty related to the negative impacts of colonialism, as detailed previously. In this way, Stacey imparts ownership of cultural knowledge through action and example.

7.0 Interpretation

In this section I summarize the idea of gathering knowledge and reclaiming culture through sharing stories. On reflection, I asked myself the following questions:

What are the similarities and differences in the stories of Indigenous women such as Stacey, Carol Rose and Sherry? What do the stories center around and how is gender reflected? How do Indigenous women’s experiences inspire others to share their stories, knowledge? Does this give a sense of value to the experience and personal definitions of Indigenous identity? Here, I incorporate the writings of Green about making space for Indigenous feminisms and to Arvin, Tuck and Morrill for discussions related to decolonizing feminism (Green 2007) (Arvin, Tuck og Morrill 2013).

These stories are about connection to culture, family and community. The stories and work of Stacey, Carol Rose and Sherry motivated me to reflect on how many Indigenous women connect because of shared stories and how can these kinds of experiences can be incorporated into an educational practice from an Indigenous perspective. The negative impacts of the *Indian*

Act in representation for Indigenous people is an important subject and the ongoing effects need more Indigenous led research.

The stories and impressions disclosed through the conversations with Stacey, Carol and Sherry show that the impacts of the *Indian Act* continue to disenfranchise Indigenous women and interfere with Indigenous defined notions of gender and gender roles. Many Indigenous people are against the continuation of the legislation and are discussing how to counter and nullify the effects of the *Indian Act*. In this way, the agency of women like Stacey, Carol and Sherry represent a unique approach to opening space for reclaiming Indigenous identity. As well, the women offer different methods of knowledge production. Storytelling, tradition and the ability to redefine gender roles are integral to Indigenous led revitalization.

Incorporating an Indigenous approach to narrative analysis, I reflect on the conversations with Stacey, Carol Rose and Sherry over time and with an awareness to the impacts our relationships have on our discussions. The reflections of the stories are grounded in a narrative analysis approach where themes and connections are the focus of gathering data. In this regard, the theme of community engagement was apparent immediately from not just the stories shared, but from the academic and artistic work of Stacey, Carol Rose and Sherry.

Stacey makes a point of learning about Indigenous arts and crafts. Stacey shares these skills with her daughter and with other Indigenous women in her community. Additionally, she gifts her traditional tattoos to friends and relatives who come to her to express their healing journey from trauma and loss. Stacey views her tattoo skills as a part of reclaiming Indigenous tradition as part of her identity and endeavors to share that experience with her community.

Carol Rose has also educated herself about her Indigenous heritage after growing up separated from her Indigenous community. Her reclaiming of her Indigenous language in her writing and performances is a method which she uses to share Indigenous culture applying a contemporary approach to education and Indigenous cultural practice. By encouraging her audiences to participate in her performances, Carol Rose demonstrates that the relationship between owning and practicing her Indigenous traditions. Her example promotes an action based approach to Indigenous cultural revitalization.

Sherry not only shares the history of a visual Métis identity in Saskatchewan, but she continuously works to document and examine stories of Métis culture and language. In doing so, Sherry reclaims the missing stories from Métis communities, including mine, in order to give

these histories space in the history of Canada. Sherry also revitalizes Métis traditions through the validation of recognizing the value of these stories for Métis people and to a relevant understanding of the history of the land. Sherry's incorporation of an Indigenous approach to sharing stories of and with the Métis community demonstrates the value of opening more space for Indigenous women to contribute to an indigenized approach to academic discourse.

Further consideration of the fieldwork conversations with Stacey, Carol Rose and Sherry also reveal that the concepts of courage and bravery are connected to reclaiming and revitalizing Indigenous traditions in the formulation of an Indigenous identity. For too long, Indigenous women have been defined from a colonial and/or masculine perspective. In this way, Indigenous women like Stacey, Carol Rose and Sherry act on defining themselves as Indigenous women outside of colonial constructs such as the *Indian Act*, and express autonomy in communicating Indigenous definitions of identity. This type of Indigenous sovereignty is essential to ensuring that future generations have space to continue the development of Indigenous led discourse and governing.

For example, when I was younger, I often felt trepidation related to using Cree or Métis words. This was due to feeling a sense of insecurity in my identity as an Indigenous person as defined by the *Indian Act*, or access to historical lands. The history of my grandmother's disconnection to her reserve and her status as well as my dad's negative residential school experience regularly inserted a sense of self-doubt associated with feeling ownership over my identity as an Indigenous girl/woman. My dad grew up also experiencing the break in his mother's connection to her land and Cree/Saulteaux identity. This negative effect related to colonial definitions of Indigenous identity meant that he unintentionally imparted those feelings of doubt and loss to me, and our family. I often reflected on the problem of feeling ownership over my Indigenous identity when I grew up experiencing that my dad did not feel a connection to his Indigenous identity. Insecurity in defining myself as truly Indigenous manifested in a further insecurity to practicing Indigenous traditions and learning to speak Métis and Cree/Saulteaux. In this way, Indigenous people who experience this disconnection feel an inner barrier to participating in Indigenous traditions and expressing an Indigenous identity.

Therefore, Indigenous women who are brave enough to reclaim their version of their Indigenous identity, provide an example for other Indigenous people to begin and continue their own journey of reclaiming Indigenous definitions of identity and cultural revitalization. Stacey,

Carol Rose and Sherry share stories of overcoming the negative impacts of colonial legislation related to the *Indian Act* and Enfranchisement, as explored earlier in this paper. The *Indian Act* and other forms of legislation attempted to split up Indigenous communities along gender lines and by disenfranchising Indigenous women. Hence, in order to counter the effects of the erasure of Indigenous women's stories in their communities, it is necessary to support a "rematriation" of Indigenous gender roles and identities (Rematriate 2018).

As discussed earlier, there have been negative reactions, even from some people within Indigenous communities, related to giving Indigenous women more power and agency in their communities. This points to why it is essential to acknowledge how Indigenous women like Stacey, Carol Rose and Sherry are leaders in reclaiming their autonomy over self-determination as Indigenous women. These women ask difficult questions about the intersections of "colonial heteropatriarchy", Indigenous gender roles and the future of Indigenous feminism (Arvin, Tuck og Morrill 2013, 11-12).

Correspondingly, embarking on a research journey in my community in Saskatchewan and writing this thesis is an element of reclaiming agency as an Indigenous woman. Despite my hesitations related to performing research, writing this thesis is also my act of reclaiming Indigenous women's voices in academia and education. Listening to the experiences of Indigenous women is necessary to oppose the negative impacts of the *Indian Act* on gender roles in Indigenous communities. Conversing with Stacey, Carol Rose and Sherry inspired me to continue to learn more about the different ways they share cultural traditions and knowledge. Interpreting their stories and their work is an inspiration to developing an creating my own story within Indigenous research. When faced with doubt related to sharing and practicing Indigenous traditions, the stories of Stacey, Carol Rose and Sherry reminded me of the value of participating in Indigenous perspectives in knowledge production. Integrating the myth of Thunderbird Woman together with the stories of Indigenous women in Saskatchewan in my research, I endeavor to document the value of connecting and relating and Indigenous perspective in academia, story by story and voice by voice.

7.1 Summary

This thesis journey has been difficult to wrap up. I am most afraid of telling the stories in a way they are meant to be told. Also, I am conflicted in the idea of whether the writing or work I have done will contribute in the real world. This is the true nature of knowledge production, the

uncertainty of determining the value of experience and learning in practice. Yet, at the same time, this is the nature of knowing, the balance between concluding and questioning. The medicine wheel provides a mode of interpreting this relationship between practicing traditions and the value of sharing experiences. The parts of the medicine wheel demonstrate the relationship between the self and producing knowledge from an Indigenous woman's perspective. The four sections of the medicine wheel provide a built-in intersectional approach to gathering and analyzing data. In addition, the circular form of the medicine wheel is a constant reminder of the ongoing nature of interpreting and sharing knowledge. The medicine wheel is a tool for considering Indigenous research from by means an Indigenous worldview and philosophical perspective.

This is comparably the nature of Indigenous storytelling. It is a form of knowledge that disperses and slowly settles. Yet, this is what makes this kind of knowledge so powerful. Stories have the possibility of becoming a part of our identity and the traditions we pass on to the next generations. The stories of Stacey, Carol Rose and Sherry and other Indigenous women must be given a space to counter the stories of the *Indian Act* and other negative colonial institutions. This is why small steps such as this thesis are important, every story is a significant contribution to the cultural community. As Stacey and one of her tattoo instructors have summarized, they revitalize poke by poke, stitch by stitch. In this way, we are able to confront the negative impacts of colonialism and create our own space for cultural reclamation, story by story and thought by thought. Additionally, sharing stories is a method for Indigenous researchers and students to begin a journey of reclaiming and healing from Indigenous traditions.

8.0 Conclusions

Indigenous women lead their communities in a diversity of ways, despite the negative impacts of the *Indian Act* on gender roles in Indigenous communities. In many circumstances, oral storytelling a part indigenizing knowledge production and sharing. The stories I have heard and the stories I have told, form the background for the stories of the Indigenous women I learned with and from. The medicine wheel forms the basis for understanding the stories of the Indigenous women and also provides an opportunity for the knowledge gained and shared to be interpreted with an Indigenous perspective. As a research paradigm, the medicine wheel provides a space for epistemology, ontology, axiology and methodology to be utilized and dissected

through an Indigenous worldview. The histories of colonial institutions, like educational institutions, are mostly constructed through a colonial perspective. This often means hierarchical systems, historically created by men. The production of knowledge, together with Indigenous women in my community opposes those notions and instead, highlights Indigenous philosophies of community and balance.

In addition, utilizing traditions of storytelling emphasizes not only the importance of women's stories, but also the shows how a colonial history left out Indigenous women. Reclaiming space for Indigenous women to connect to and relate with their communities is part of "rematriating" Indigenous communities and identities (Rematriate 2018). As well, Indigenous women's stories open a space for questioning the impacts of the *Indian Act* on gender roles in Indigenous communities. This means asking difficult questions about the nature of gendered traditions in Indigenous ceremony and philosophy. However, asking these questions and sharing stories of resilience creates a means for Indigenous people to relate to the profound changes the *Indian Act* had on Indigenous communities and have agency over confronting negative impacts to Indigenous women and their families. Moreover, asking difficult questions provides a means to find solutions together, as a community without the influence of colonial perspectives on gender. For instance, many Indigenous women are taking ownership over traditions such as drumming and singing in ceremony. Some people question the traditions of the pow wow protocols, or the blessing rules in respect to the nature of the practice. This has led to discussions related to accepting the colonial influence on many traditions and finding ways to indigenize those colonial impacts.

Part of Indigenizing knowledge production is incorporating Indigenous research paradigms, like the medicine wheel, in order to support space for Indigenous methodologies in research and education. Starting at the community level, it is possible to recognize Indigenous women's diversity in leadership and cultural revitalization. It is also necessary to develop definitions of Indigenous feminism with Indigenous women. The words of Lee Maracle describe strong Indigenous women as "... part of a global movement of women in the world, struggling for emancipation. Women worldwide will define the movement" (Maracle 1996, 137). I am inspired by Maracle's words and choose to view Indigenous women as Thunderbird women, who are contributing to reclaiming women's agency and identities in their communities.

Indigenous women contribute to building community, cultivating relationships, communication, trust, identity, oral knowledge, storytelling, reclaiming, rematriating, sharing knowledge, opposition to colonial institutions, focus on motherhood and children and finally the value of ceremony. Leanne Simpson states when discussing Nishnaabeg (Indigenous) knowledge, “(i)ntelligence flows through relationships between living entities” (Simpson 2014, 10). This concept is evident in the work of the women I observed. There is a plurality of methods, including storytelling, which Stacey, Carol Rose and Sherry utilize to disseminate knowledge and an Indigenous perspective in education.

For this reason, Isaac Murdoch’s sharing of his family’s Thunderbird woman story is valuable to me and to defining my cultural identity. Where I cannot remember or do not have access to various stories or traditional knowledge, people such as Isaac and Christie are in a position to share their knowledge. By sharing their stories, they help make connections and fill in gaps on the larger cultural fabric (Chilisa 2012, 140-141). This type of knowledge production is vital for future generations due to the impacts of colonial institutions, such as the residential school system. There is a legacy of cultural loss and restrictive knowledge practice. Yet, when First Nations communities do have the possibility to come together and share information of all kinds, the relations to Indigenous identity are reinforced. An important aspect of this is the power to self-define, self-identify and the duty to “get the story right” (L. T. Smith 2012, 226).

It is difficult for me to end this research project. Because even though this is an ending in a way, it is also just the beginning. I imagine a future filled with meeting and reading about all of the Indigenous women who continue to contribute to their communities. I know that finishing this story is difficult because it is not just my story, but the story of the agency of Indigenous women. I know this story still requires work, and people to work, against the colonial impacts of the *Indian Act*. I also know that there are Indigenous women working on that right now. It is impossible to end a story that is still being written and so, although this is the conclusion of this part of the story, it is also makes possible a space for the next part in the story. In this respect, I am very passionate about continuing to document and raise up the voices and stories of Indigenous women. I would like to take those stories further by including a study of references to the *Indian Act* online – changing it or doing away with it, attitudes towards the future of the Assembly of First Nations and views on the treaties and how Indigenous women are represented in these negotiations.

Just as my face tattoo is now a part of my story and a part of who I am, so too are the Indigenous women with whom I spent time, and as well the journey of writing this thesis. This process is now tattooed in my mind as an experience which is connected to all of my experiences before and all of my experiences after. This thesis project is like a two-row wampum belt with my story on one line, and the research on another line.

9.0 (postscript) Wearing my research

The experiences that I have been a part of during fieldwork have contributed the development of a visual interpretation of reclaiming my cultural heritage. My story includes a search for feeling ownership over my Cree/Métis heritage as well as connections between my experience and other Indigenous women. The conversations with Stacey, Sherry and Carol are a part of finding connections in our stories and recognizing the similarities and differences. One aspect of listening to other women share stories of reclaiming their identities is the inspiration which they facilitate. The medicine wheel incorporates a “relational” research paradigm, with relational ontology, axiology, epistemology and methodology, as illustrated by Chilisa’s writing on postcolonial research paradigms (Chilisa 2012, 115-119). Indigenous research paradigms link Indigenous ways of knowing to innovative developments in knowledge production, both at the cultural and academic level. Chilisa refers to the four dimensions of indigenous research and describes, “(4) in its most advanced form, its assumptions about what counts as reality, knowledge, and values in research are informed by an indigenous research paradigm” (Chilisa 2012, 13). My response to their stories of strength and revitalization is what I have termed ‘wearing my research’ as a variation of indigenous autoethnography. I also feel that as an Indigenous researcher, I am honored with the capacity to participate. This aspect is discussed by Paul Whitinui and he writes, “(i)ndigenous autoethnography as a culturally distinctive way of coming to know who we are as indigenous peoples within the research agenda. The difference privileges a “Native” researcher as someone who is either Native by birth (i.e., indigenous) or who can connect genealogically to someone who is Native and can intimately speak about the cultural underlays/overlays associated with time, space, place, and identity (Whitinui 2013, 461). The traditional tattoos, the beading, the Cree and Métis languages and the artwork that I have acquired or produced during this thesis project are a part of my story going forward. I wear these experiences on my body or demonstrate through my actions. The traditional face tattoo is a part

of my visual identity and is a reminder of the continuation of traditions and stories in the creation of identity. The beading skills that I have practiced while telling stories with Stacey are a part of my skill-set now and I can share these skills with my daughters. As well, the stories and Cree language used by Carol are an inspiration to learn our languages and share that knowledge. Sherry and her research as well as Métis artwork contribute to the continued reclaiming of Métis stories and identity. In this way, I wear my research and I live my research as a part of an Indigenous methodology and my story of reclaiming and revitalizing my Indigenous heritage. I also feel that as a part of the Indigenous community, I am privileged with the capacity to participate. Stories of Indigenous women from all parts of the world are connected through their struggle with colonial patriarchy. Finding connections between Indigenous women's experiences provides an opportunity to include diverse reflections on Indigenous autonomy in telling our own stories. Confronting my own loss and trauma through the conversations with Indigenous women in my community in Saskatchewan is a journey of healing. I wear my markings (traditional tattoos) in solidarity with Indigenous women from all parts of the Indigenous world and know that this simple act connects our stories of empowerment through acknowledging Indigenous traditions in identity. I acknowledge the value of every Indigenous woman's story of resistance, resilience and "rematriation" (Rematriate 2018). Through my research journey, I have come to a better understanding of how sewing together the stories of Indigenous women creates the fabric of resilience.

Appendices:

WHO IS LEFT OUT?

There are a number of issues remaining in the *Indian Act* which go unaddressed by this bill:

Status hierarchy remains

This refers to the hierarchy of status between 6(1)(a) (male category) and 6(1)(c) status (re-instated female category). This gap also means 6(1)(c) women and their descendants are relegated to a different, often stigmatized and deemed 'lesser' category of status.



Unstated parentage is problematic

When applying for status on behalf of a child, the registering individuals - predominantly women - must supply "relevant evidence" which is difficult for many to access, or in cases where fathers refuse to sign the application forms, is impossible. In cases of rape, incest or abuse, this process can even be traumatic.



Band membership issues

Rules regarding band membership leave the opportunity for communities to discriminate against women.



Appendix 1 (N. NWAC, Bill S-3 Infograph 2018)

THE INDIAN ACT

SAID WHAT?

The *Indian Act* was created to control and assimilate Indigenous peoples and their communities. Throughout history, a number of shocking and discriminatory measures have been in place.

1876

The *Indian Act* is created. Any existing Indigenous self-government structures at this time are **extinguished**.

An Indian is defined as "any **male person of Indian blood**" and their children. Provisions include: status women who marry non-status men lose status; non-status women who marry status men gain status and anyone with status who earns a degree or becomes a **doctor, lawyer or clergyman** is also enfranchised.

1880

Though not a law but a policy, Indigenous farmers are expected have a **permit** to sell cattle, grain, hay or produce. They must also have a permit to buy groceries and clothes.

1884

Attendance in **residential schools** becomes mandatory for status Indians until they turn 16. Children are forcibly removed and separated from their families and are not allowed to speak their own language or practice their own religious rituals. The **sale of alcohol** to Indigenous peoples is prohibited.

1885

Indigenous peoples are banned from conducting their own **spiritual ceremonies** such as the **potlatch**. A pass system is also created and Indigenous peoples are **restricted from leaving their reserve** without permission.

1886

The definition of Indian is expanded to include "any person who is reputed to belong to a particular band or who follows the Indian mode of life, or any child of such person." Voluntary enfranchisement is allowed for anyone who is "of **good moral character**" and "temperate in his or her habits".

1914

Indigenous peoples are required to ask for official permission before wearing any "**costume**" at public events. Dancing is outlawed off reserve. In 1925, it is outlawed entirely.

1918

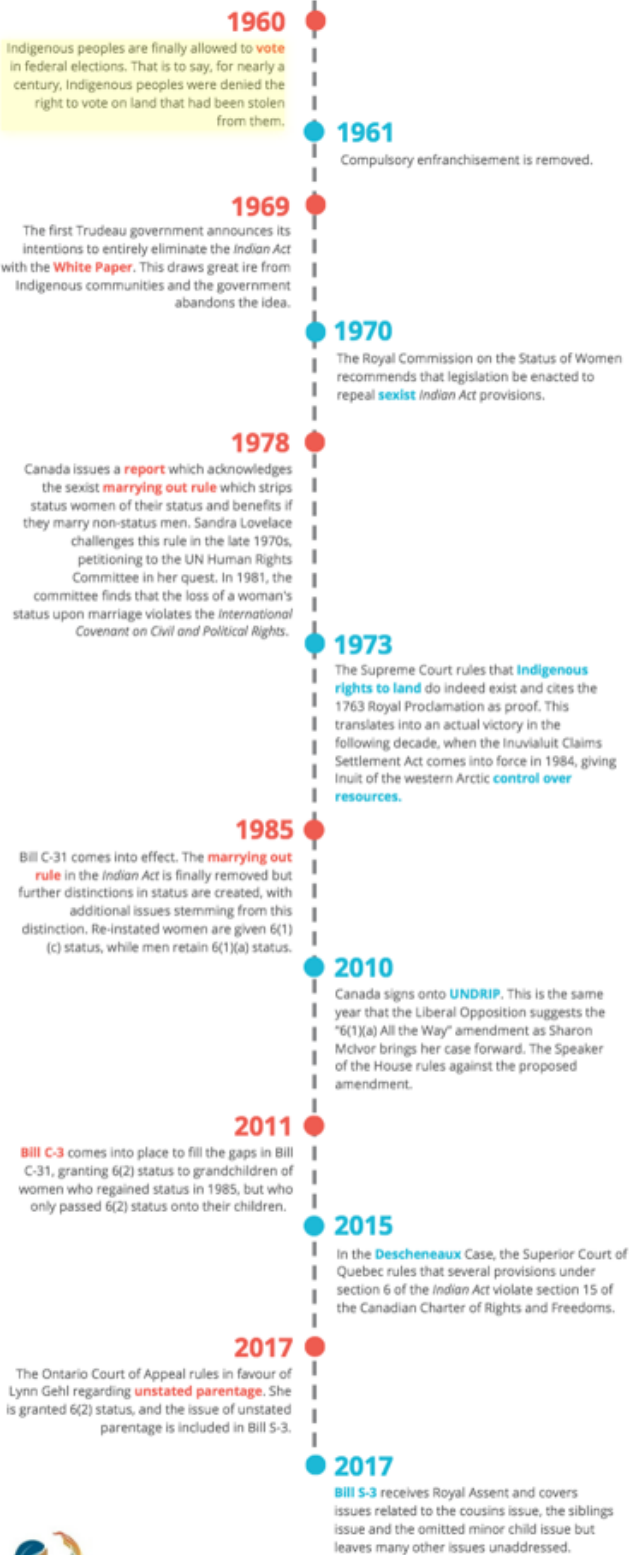
The Canadian government gives itself the power to **lease out Indigenous land** to non-Indigenous persons if it is being used for farming.

1927

Indigenous peoples are banned from hiring **lawyers or legal representation** regarding land claims against the federal government without the government's approval.

1951

After the Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Commons looks at the Act again in the late 1940s, the bans on dances, ceremonies and legal claims are **removed**. Women are now allowed to vote in **band council elections**. Provisions that are still in place include compulsory enfranchisement through marriage to a non-status man; Indigenous peoples who receive a **degree** or become a doctor, clergyman or lawyer lose status. 1951 amendments now enact the "**double mother rule**" which removes the status of a person whose mother and grandmother were given status through marriage.



Appendix 3 (N. NWAC, Bill S-3 Infograph 2018)

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