

Weaving Indigenous Identity in Post-Secondary “Situations”: Supporting students with complex Indigenous identities in a University context

by

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Abstract

For Indigenous students, post-secondary institutions are places that offer both opportunities for growth and knowledge, and challenges that cause many of us to struggle on our journey towards a degree. As places of learning they not only afford us the chance to learn new skills, they also give us space to learn about ourselves in ways we may not have had while at home.

For many Indigenous students the journey through post-secondary also becomes a journey of identity where we gain new understandings of who we are. However, as they are built on colonial foundations where the education is based in a western worldview, historically these institutions have pressured Indigenous peoples to give up their beliefs and even identities in order to graduate.

As a result of the efforts of many Indigenous scholars and community members, this is beginning to change. The university where I both work and attend school has grown and changed much in the past five years. Truth and Reconciliation, decolonization, and Indigenization have become much more recognized, and this shift has created more space for Indigenous students to be/become themselves while on campus. Although these efforts are important steps, Indigenous students still must often leave their home communities to attend, and come to learn in ways they do not relate to. They still face racism, both systemic and interpersonal, and walk in a world they may have little familiarity with.

Using the x^wməθk^wəyəm spindle whorl as my framework, and the process of gathering, spinning, and weaving as my methodology, I asked four students to share their stories of their identity journey. I have woven their stories together with my own, as well as with the relevant secondary research in order to help show how post-secondary contributes to identity shifts and

positive growth, and to highlight what more needs to be done in order to better respect Indigenous peoples.

Lay Summary

For Indigenous peoples, post-secondary institutions can be places to both get a degree and to find new learnings about ourselves. While attending university Indigenous students find their identities growing and changing as a result of their experiences. Although post-secondary institutions are beginning to address things like Truth and Reconciliation and colonization, these schools are still challenging places for Indigenous peoples to be in. Using a x^wməθk^wəyəm approach to the work, I have woven the stories of four Indigenous students together to show their strength, to discuss where the university could offer better support, and to show how Indigenous identity grows and changes throughout our journeys.

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Chapter One – Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Situating myself

Hello, my name is Sandra Fox and I am from the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam) First Nation. I am the daughter of Doris Fox (Mearns) who is also from x^wməθk^wəyəm, as was her mother Grace Mearns (Point). My mother was raised on the Musqueam Indian Reserve #2 with her ten brothers and sisters. My father Gordon Fox is a third-generation settler from England who grew up in the traditional, ancestral, and unceded Musqueam territory in what is now Vancouver. After marrying, my parents moved to the Interior of BC for my father's work. I grew up and have spent most of my life as a guest in Syilx and Secwepemc territories. I am also a mother to two young children, Bryson who is nine and Leina who is six, and I have a younger sister, Lori with whom I am very close.

Coming to graduate school has caused me to reflect on my life in a new way, and looking back I can see how I was almost led here. In order to situate myself in the writing and provide context, I will offer an abridged story of how I came to this work. My experiences influence how I view the world and conduct research. I feel that situating myself also avoids the idea of pan-Indianism, the idea that Indigenous peoples are one homogenous cultural group, and allows for transparency so the reader can better understand my writing and perspective (Kovach, 2009).

I grew up fairly disconnected from my home community, and although I lived a fairly privileged childhood in many ways, I grew up confused and ashamed of my Indigenous¹

¹ The government of Canada uses the term "Aboriginal" to refer to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples collectively. However, I prefer to use "Indigenous" as it honours the fact that we are from and connected to this land. When used in reference to specific titles or names "Aboriginal" may be used. Whenever possible I will refer to specific nations of peoples rather than broad terms.

identity. My mother did her best to pass on the teachings she was given by her grandparents and relatives, but at times this clashed with my father's perceptions of Indigenous peoples which was often unselfconsciously racist. When I was younger I was able to connect with the spirituality and teachings from my mother, but the discord with my father's views and those of settler society led to feelings of shame and confusion about who I was. On the one side my mother told me of the beauty and strength of our people and our ways, and on the other my father told me how "Indians"² are drunks, thieves, and lazy. I also felt like an outsider in my home community and culture since we spent little time there (although my relatives have always been welcoming – and in fact they have always maintained that my sister and I are x^wməθk^wəyəm). At the time I did not understand all of this, I was just experiencing and trying to survive.

I did fairly well in school academically, but I often felt like I didn't quite fit in with my peers as they did not seem to understand how I viewed the world. I have distinct memories from the start of school of feeling lonely, like no one understood me. In Grade 4 I remember learning about the Indians who lived on the Prairies hundreds of years ago, but they didn't look anything like my family. I felt confused and ashamed when I couldn't answer all the questions my classmates asked about Indians; I didn't match with what they believed and what the book said an Indian was. It seemed to be safer to stay quiet about who I was in order to avoid feeling so wrong around others. I wondered if I was really an Indian at all. And if I was, maybe it wasn't a good thing.

² Over the course of this thesis I will be using the term "Indian" when referring to contexts where that is/was the term that is actually used; I mark the term here with double quotes, but will drop the quotes from the rest of the thesis. Over the course of the last few decades the use of the term has declined for many good reasons.

As a teenager I lived in Salmon Arm, a small town in Secwepemc territory with very little racial or political diversity at the time. In junior high I hid my Indigeneity or belittled it, and started to turn away from my mother's teachings towards my father's very western ways. I did not see my mother's ways reflected anywhere in the world I saw, but I did see how the Native family down the road from the school was treated when they lost their mother. The eldest son, who was about my age, left school to care for his siblings. I saw people make fun of him for it, saying he would never amount to anything anyway. I heard people call the beautiful Secwepemc girl whose locker was down the hall from me a slut and a crazy squaw. Indigenous people were not welcome in Salmon Arm, and I did not want to be hated. So I decided I had to go to university, get a job, get married, and have kids in order to be "successful" in life.

Unfortunately, taking this path caused me to move away from my spirituality and my already limited cultural connections. I eventually became anxious, depressed, afraid, and stressed. I was becoming disconnected with who I was, but I interpreted my state of mind to mean that I needed to try harder to fit in. When I came to Kelowna to do my undergraduate degree (and escape Salmon Arm and all the memories there) I really noticed how different my ways of thinking were from what the professors were presenting, and my grades reflected this. I felt like I just wasn't cut out for post-secondary, even though I was an "A" student in high school. I eventually changed out of the science program and oddly found a home in anthropology. A few of the professors I met in that faculty were such open-minded thinkers and were so respectful of everyone that I began to look at professors differently. Their approach to the discipline and the academy showed me it was not as rigid and unforgiving as I had thought. Maybe I wasn't as stupid as I believed either, I just needed a framework that more closely resembled my ways of thinking and looking at the world. In the summers I

would go back to my community to either work in the band office, or later at the Native Education Centre doing administrative work. I loved the connections in those offices. Although I did see lateral violence, I also saw passion and kindness that inspired me. I was welcomed in those offices and felt at home. After graduating I worked for other Aboriginal organizations, received an Editing certificate, and then was ready (as one ever is) to have children.

After my son was two, I found myself working in the Aboriginal Programs and Services department at the very campus I had done my undergraduate work, although now it had a new name and many new buildings, people, and money. While working there I had the opportunity to connect with Indigenous students from all over Canada, and while they met with me to discuss course planning they often shared pieces of their stories with me. I was often surprised at how many students spoke about their identities, and how coming to post-secondary marked a shift in their understanding of who they were.

Also during this time, I took the first-year Indigenous studies course with the late Dr. Gregory Younging, and I started to realize how colonization had shaped my family's reality and my own identity. This course helped me start connecting the disparate pieces in my life, and I was amazed I had gone my entire life without realizing I inherited this legacy of colonization. Many threads of my story are also in the stories of the students I have spoken with, and I wanted to explore that. I also wanted to know what it was about post-secondary that was contributing to this identity shift in students, and what the institution could do to better support this. I applied to the graduate program to explore Indigenous identity and its relationship with post-secondary with several intentions in mind.

First, I was at a point in my life where I was terribly confused about who I was. I had two small children, a husband I had known since I was 14, a house, and a job. I had all of the

things I thought I needed to feel better. But I was miserable. I was anxious and depressed, so lost in my own pain I often struggled to give my children the connection they needed. I loved them so much, did everything I could for them, and what I thought I was supposed to do. I followed the rules, enrolling them in activities, making play dates, planning birthdays, and spending endless hours on Pinterest finding recipes and ideas on how to make all of this happen. My job was amazing, as were the people I worked with and the students I served. Why was I so miserable? Although this question has many answers, at the time the only thing I could think to do was return to school. I truly *felt* something in Greg's class, his passion igniting a passion in me I had squelched since elementary school. As I had very few things in my life I felt truly passionate about, I jumped into my studies with enthusiasm. Second, after spending much of my life doubting who I am, living in unacknowledged shame, I was eager to discover more about intergenerational trauma, colonization (both internalized and externalized), and identity. Being able to understand how these things have been woven throughout my life as well as society allowed me to see my life differently, and I realized I didn't have to be so ashamed and confused anymore. And finally, maybe I can help others. Being able to read the stories of other researchers brought me peace and understanding because I could see myself in their writing. I was able to take their lessons and learn from them, and I was so grateful for that healing. I am also aware of how powerful story is, and how healing it can be to share one's story. If I could do even a fraction of the good these other stories had done for me for another person, I would be even more grateful. I have never wanted a job just for the sake of getting by. In fact, I have a distinct memory from when I was about five or six of talking to my father about work. He told me you had to get a job and keep it for the rest of your life, so you could buy a house and retire comfortably. I remember

feeling like I had a prison sentence to look forward to. I dreamed of doing something that was meaningful to both me and to others. This is one small part of me doing that.

1.2 Why do this work?

Historically in academia, Indigenous peoples and their identity have been examined and theorized about by non-Indigenous researchers in Western institutions (Smith, 1999). This led to a plethora of misinformation on Indigenous peoples, which informed policies, laws, and public opinion. Typically, media presents a very biased, western view on Indigenous peoples and issues as well. These things together with our colonial history have created a particular set of associations in the minds of the dominant society around who or what Indigenous people are. It has also created a difficult situation for Indigenous peoples as many of us also carry confusion about who we are as a result of all of this (Battiste, 2000; Lawrence, 2004; Vizenor, 1994).

However, as there have been Indigenous academics sharing their voices for decades, there now exists a considerable amount of scholarly research done by Indigenous researchers on topics important to Indigenous peoples. Having Indigenous peoples share our own stories in this way provides a more appropriate perspective of our history and our relationships with one another.

Indigenous peoples also have a complicated relationship with the education system in Canada. The trauma from residential schools left many Indigenous people with a deep mistrust of institutions, including schools. Educational policies are based in a western worldview, founded with a colonial mindset. This means that our public schools today are often difficult places for Indigenous children to be, as the lessons (both academic and social) they receive at school are often very different than those they receive from their family and

community. Post-secondary institutions are also based in a western worldview, and students must often leave their home communities to attend. As more Indigenous peoples are attending post-secondary, and they are looking to see themselves reflected in the institution.

Given this, I feel it is important to present more Indigenous voices on the topic of Indigenous identity and the role education has in our lives. By presenting more of our stories backed with academic research we create more space for ourselves. It is also my intention to use the research, woven with the stories of the students, to make recommendations to UBCO on how they could better support Indigenous students. In September 2019 UBC Okanagan formally committed to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action (University of British Columbia, 2019) and in April 2018 UBC's president Santa Ono formally apologized for participating in a system that supported residential schools (University of British Columbia, 2018). The new UBC Indigenous Strategic Plan is currently being drafted and will likely be adopted later this Summer. With this new wave of institutional support for reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, the truth can be made available more readily. I was once told by a Syilx Elder that we cannot have reconciliation without first knowing the truth. We must create a safe environment for the storytellers to tell their truths, and the listener must work to understand and integrate the lessons contained within those stories.

1.3 Research Questions

Finding research questions was not easy for me, as once I started exploring Indigenous identity and the education system and saw how complex it was, it was difficult to narrow the focus. However, after much reading and thinking (and crying and praying) I found myself pulled to a few key areas.

How do Indigenous students perceive their own Indigenous identity, and how has it grown or changed through their lives? How does this influence their experiences at the University of British Columbia, Okanagan campus and in their lives in general? Are there similarities in our stories? What role does colonialism play in Indigenous identity and the education system? What impact has the post-secondary experience had on their Indigenous identity? Did the institution support their identity development, and what can be done to improve on this?

I have woven in portions of my own story as well, as this research journey has changed my own identity. It is my hope that by doing this it will keep me connected and able to convey these important aspects of Indigenous identity in a good way, with the emotion and spirit of the stories of the students. It also helps situate me in the research, so the reader can understand why I have done the work this way.

1.4 Organization of the work

Now that I have introduced the research and myself, in chapter two I move into an explanation of my theoretical framework which is based on my understandings as an off-reserve x^wməθk^wəyəm woman. The spindle whorl, which I chose to base my framework on, is used to spin the gathered wool together into yarn so it can be used for weavings. This section will explain why I chose the spindle whorl, and will show how an Indigenous theoretical framework can be used successfully to guide research. In this chapter I will also explore a x^wməθk^wəyəm weaving methodology used to bring together the voices of the Indigenous students I worked with, the research other Indigenous scholars have done, and my own perspectives and experiences. As Indigenous and western worldviews are very different I will

also discuss some of the difficulties in bringing these two perspectives together in an Indigenous research context.

Chapter three is my literature review, which I have chosen to conduct as an Indigenous contextual review. Kaszas (2018) introduced this concept to me in his graduate work, referring to it as an Indigenized contextual review. This transformation of the western literature review allows me to tell the story of the research journey through my relationships and understandings with the literature.

In chapter four I introduce the Indigenous students I interviewed, and weave their stories into the work. I present their stories following the main interview themes we discussed together. I also provide a short summary of their words, based on my own understandings. Finally, I will present a summary of the talking circle I participated in with three of the students.

In chapter five I explore the themes that arose from talking with the students and discuss how I used those to inform a series of recommendations to the institution. As it is important to me that this work does something meaningful, it is my hope that this section will help further inform the steadily increasing Indigenous engagement happening at UBCO.

Finally, in chapter six I re-examine the journey through this research, reflect on the lessons I have learned, explore gaps and possible further directions of inquiry, and offer concluding thoughts.

Chapter Two – Theoretical Framework, Methodologies, and Methods

2.1 Indigenous Theoretical Framework: The x^wməθk^wəyəm Spindle Whorl

A theoretical framework acts as the foundation for the research that is conducted, and is meant to “illustrate ‘the thinking’ behind ‘the doing’” (Kovach, 2009, p. 39). Creating a theoretical framework required me to reflect on Indigenous ways of knowing, specifically my own. I wanted to be sure I was honouring my ancestors and my family, as well as the Indigenous students, and anyone else this research may impact. Given the often negative historical relationship Indigenous communities have had with Eurocentric research, it was important my framework be grounded in Indigenous community. In search of this perspective I followed my mother’s teachings: I sat quietly, got grounded, and prayed on the matter. I then went on with my day knowing I would find the answer. Later that day the image of a spindle whorl appeared clearly in my mind, and I knew this was what I was looking for (see Figure 1, below).

Figure 1: The Spindle Whorl



My mother told me the spindle whorl is about balance, rhythm, and cadence. Without balance the work becomes hard, and each spinner must find the balance to become comfortable with the work, so it goes faster. While using the spindle whorl to spin, the spinner may enter a meditative state, becoming connected, centred and at peace, allowing the

work to flow easily. Using a framework that stresses balance and peace guided my research with Indigenous students in a way that honours each individual's rhythm and cadence.

As a framework, the centre, or spindle, represents my x^wməθk^wəyəm epistemology where the whorl spins from. Without the spindle, the whorl would not work. This illustrates that I am approaching the work from a x^wməθk^wəyəm or tribal epistemology that privileges x^wməθk^wəyəm knowledge and explains my research decisions more clearly as they are made in alignment with this epistemology (Kovach, 2009). Kovach draws attention to the tensions felt by Indigenous researchers in using the colonizer's language of the academy in creating frameworks, but highlights the benefits in making a framework to acknowledge the culture that influences research, the methods selected, and the interpretation of knowledge in order to give back in a meaningful way. This tension is embodied in the framework I have selected as I grew up feeling the pull between the world of the colonizer and the colonized. Although I am trying to make the journey to decolonize and re-Indigenize myself, the reality is I do not speak the hənqəminəm language and grew up having only my mother as my main source of cultural knowledge, rather than the entire community. It is fitting to use something as significant to the x^wməθk^wəyəm as the spindle whorl in an academic setting with English as the language to communicate my research, as it calls attention to the balancing I feel I do every day between these two worlds and my desire to reconcile the tensions I feel in my body. Absolon (2011) notes how our Indigenous worldviews influence the methodology we choose, because our worldview influences how we see the world and how we act in relation to it. The spindle whorl shows my worldview is based in x^wməθk^wəyəm, and the use of the English language shows how I walk in two worlds. Many of the students who come to UBCO experience this need to walk in two worlds as they may identify in many ways. Students must not only navigate the culture of a post-secondary institution and learn to speak the academic

language, they must also move between cultures in order to reconcile differences in cultures and worldviews (Frideres, 2008; Willett, 2007).

This tension of “being both cultural and colonial” (Absolon, 2011, p. 101) is shown in having x^wməθk^wəyəm epistemology as the spindle whorl centre, and makes my worldview clear to the Indigenous post-secondary student community, which is important in establishing and strengthening our relationships over the course of this research journey. It situates me, or locates me, in order to keep everything ethically transparent to the students who choose to work with me. It prevents me from distancing myself from the students (Haraway, 1988) and also helps me to remember who I am. It keeps me connected with myself and my ancestors (Absolon, 2011), and draws attention to the fact that the knowledge I have is grounded in my own experiences. This leaves room for the many truths of each student, rather than the Western idea of one truth or one norm (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Frideres, 2011; Kovach, 2009). Students may have varying degrees of awareness of their Indigenous culture, but their worldviews are likely Indigenous (Restoule, 2008). Creating space for dialogue will validate their own individual truth. If I do not maintain transparency, or lose balance and connection, there is a risk of repeating colonial research patterns. This is inherently damaging to Indigenous peoples and must be avoided. However, if I can maintain these things it will ensure the work is done from the heart, with the best interests of Indigenous students in mind.

Not only is the spindle representative of the epistemology, it is also representative of my belief in the importance of becoming a whole person on this research journey. In order to spin wool properly, the spindle must balance the whorl properly. As a researcher hoping to build relationships with Indigenous students I must balance myself. I must listen to my spirit, acknowledge my emotions, build my knowledge, and stay healthy. If I do not do these things, I will become unbalanced and the whorl will not work properly. As Absolon (2011) notes,

the worldview or epistemology is about the circle, including the heart, mind, body, and Spirit so that you understand how you walk in order to be sure you are doing it in a good way. If I lose sight of any of these things, my work will reflect this and others could be harmed. In order to minimize risk to Indigenous students, I must maintain my balance so that I can show respect, gratitude, and love. Maintaining balance in myself and in the research to the best of my ability will encourage students to do the same, so we can put our stories together in a meaningful way.

Indigenous students who attend UBCO come from both rural and urban areas, on- and off-reserve, from the North in Inuit territory, and all across what is now Canada. Students are Métis, Inuit, and First Nations, with varying degrees of connectivity to their Indigeneity. Situating myself becomes all the more important given this fact, as it allows students from multiple backgrounds with their own truths to bring these aspects of themselves to the research. It removes the idea that I am in any way an “expert” and acknowledges that we all have something to contribute on this journey. This is an important consideration as historically Indigenous peoples have been researched by so-called experts, effectively removing any Indigenous control over the process (Smith, 1999) and relegating Indigenous knowledges to the sidelines. I am creating more space for our many truths by asking for students to share their stories in their own words, with the mutual understanding that our truths are based in our own experiences.

The whorl itself embodies the idea of interconnections and relationships. The whorl was often decorated with a design that represented what the spinner felt was important. As the spinner twisted the spindle whorl this decoration would blur together to help create a meditative state while spinning. This is reminded me of the phrase “nác'amət ct,” which

loosely translates from *hənqəminəm* to “we are all one.” Many Indigenous peoples share the concept of all things being connected and related, and so are in relationship with one another (Absolon, 2011; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Using a framework that maintains this as a critical part of the structure means the work I do with Indigenous students must always build and strengthen relationships, as it is in relationships that knowledge is formed through a blending of views and stories (Wilson, 2008). The idea of interconnectedness cannot be emphasized enough, as what one of us does as an individual has ripple effects we may not be able to predict. What I do as a researcher could impact students in ways I cannot account for, making me accountable to them and to others connected to them (Weber-Pillwax, 2004). Losing sight of interconnectedness and relationships could cause harm to students and to others, so having these concepts as such a major part of the framework is no accident.

Indigenous peoples have historically had their worldviews dismissed by the dominant society, to the point that their very thoughts are taken (Brayboy, 2014). This is reflected in education systems that historically privileged Eurocentric worldviews. Research has been intrusive and ignored the wishes of the community (Assembly of First Nations, ND; NAHO, 2005). The spindle whorl framework keeps the Indigenous worldview and desires in the centre. The spindle whorl reminds me of the importance of relationships and process, and valuing the stories and language passed down to us from the Elders in order to create something that is beautiful and a part of survival. Otherwise I would be in danger of creating more colonization and hurt. As Antone, Miller, and Myers (1986) note, there must be an element of culture in order to achieve our basic needs of safety and belonging and avoid the loss of faith in institutions such as educational institutions. By using a framework that acknowledges deep-rooted cultural beliefs, Indigenous students can embrace their heritage and beliefs in an accepting environment.

The x^wməθk^wəyəm spindle whorl serves to remind me that this work is about community, relationships, and working towards balance. This means my research is more than about my own hopes and views; it is about what Indigenous students want and need in order to have the best possible experience while in a post-secondary institution. The spindle whorl helps me to connect with my own culture, while encouraging students to connect with theirs. This focus on relationships and connections stems from the concept nəc'amət ct, and what I do will impact others. The research must keep this interconnectedness as foundational in order to maintain balance, and to weave something that will hopefully be both beautiful and useful to Indigenous students.

2.2 Indigenous Methodologies

Designing a methodological approach to Indigenous research that will not only be appropriate but also relevant to the Indigenous community requires the researcher to give serious consideration to concepts like reciprocity, Indigenous ethics, relationships, and protocols (Absolon, 2011; Anderson & Younging, 2015; Kovach, 2009). This means putting the community the researcher is partnering with in the centre of the work to ensure the community benefits as well as the researcher.

There are Western methodologies that embrace useful, community-based approaches such as Participatory Action Research; however, the methodology a researcher uses must reflect the theoretical framework and epistemology of the researcher while keeping the best interests of the community as the focus. As an Indigenous researcher working with Indigenous post-secondary students, adopting an Indigenous methodology seems like the most appropriate course, while leaving room to incorporate other methodologies as appropriate. In working towards a decolonizing approach to research it is important to avoid the idea that all Indigenous peoples have the same culture by adopting a methodology that

reflects my own framework and epistemology, while allowing for and supporting the multiplicities of Indigenous student backgrounds. The methodology must also ground the research process in Indigenous values and ethics such as holism, respect for protocol, reciprocity, and relationship building in order to avoid an unbalanced approach. These interwoven values are meant to be in line or in harmony with the energies of the Earth, the Universe, and as I was taught, the Great Spirit. This is crucial as these energies are based in love and light, so research must be done from a place of great love in order to ensure harmony is maintained and all peoples benefit and grow from it. The research then, must be done from an ethical place holding the benefits of community as central from the time the topic is selected, all the way through to completion of the final research results, and on into the future.

Given the differences between Indigenous nations and communities in this country, there cannot be a single Indigenous methodology. As I have situated myself as a person of mixed heritage, from the x^wməθk^wəyəm First Nation, living in Syilx territory, my viewpoint, framework, and methodology is reflective of my situation. My methodology thus flows from my situation, and through my framework. While talking with my mother about this framework, she also told me about how our ancestors gathered and spun the wool, and how the blankets that were woven were often given away. This process felt like a methodology, and aligned well with my framework.

Gathering the wool was a community process that required extensive preparation and cooperation. It meant a long, slow journey to find the tufts of goat wool attached to bushes and trees, and it took a long time to find the amount of wool required for the weavings. The Elders, women, and children worked together to gather the wool, stomp it down into the baskets, and clean the wool and each other. This time was a time for Elders to tell stories,

teach and sing songs, and of course, to build relationships and language. This process of gathering the wool reminds me of doing research as it requires a lot of preparation, and requires the collaboration and cooperation of a lot of people. It is also a time to build relationships and to share knowledge. Without this, my research would only be focused on me and would not necessarily benefit anyone else. However, bringing together many voices in collaboration after careful preparation means that I am conducting research that will be meaningful and beneficial to many people. It is about partnerships, sharing of benefits, and allowing all participants to contribute, which is critical in Indigenous research (Assembly of First Nations, ND; Battiste & Henderson, 2000). Working together is also a way to build capacity, as students can have first-hand experience working with a graduate student on research (Canada, 2014; NAHO, 2005). It is my hope that this will inspire others to conduct research of their own once they see it is something that is attainable.

All of the small individual fibres are spun together to create a long strand, and these strands are then woven together to make the blanket. Spinning also shows how two things (the spindle and the whorl) must work together to create something that is both beautiful and useful. As a researcher, it is my task to bring together the individual stories that are shared with me to create something that is useful and, with any luck, compelling. It is up to the spinner to take the small fibres and spin them together, and later to weave them together. As a researcher I am a listener, as I listened to the stories of the students. It is my responsibility to take the knowledge that is shared with me and figure out what it means, much in the same way as the listener must figure out the meaning in a story (Archibald, 2008). The listener must be centred and go within, much as the spinner does. The stories are then spun together, and then woven with the research. Stories and spinning also teach us to be patient. These lessons must also be part of the framework in order to bring the knowledge from the students

and academic research together. Without patience, things can be overlooked and mistakes can be made.

Finally, as the culmination of the work, the spun wool can be woven into a blanket. This again shows connection, as the individual threads are spun together and then woven from one end of the blanket to the other end. Everything is connected within the weaving, and without those connections it would not be a blanket. Every imperfection becomes a part of the weaving, making it unique. The techniques and skill are visible, and the blankets can be used for both warmth and some for ceremony. The research done with Indigenous students will take all of the stories, thoughts, and readings and synthesize them together into something with meaning that can be used to improve post-secondary experiences. The work is not just about attaining a degree, it is about making something that will benefit as many people as possible, for as long as possible by taking the groups interests into consideration while weaving the blanket (Battiste & Henderson, 2000).

2.3 Bringing together two worlds: Storytelling and Transcription

Archibald through her writing (2008), Dr. Jeannette Armstrong through her teachings in her research ethics course, and my mother have taught me the importance of our words. There is both energy and power in our words. Our words are representative of our inner selves, including our beliefs, thoughts, understandings, feelings, and spirit. We are responsible for the effect our words have, as they have the ability to heal and harm. And that energy ripples out and touches others. We must therefore take our words very seriously.

The stories of the four students form the spirit and heart of this writing. Although the research and my own experiences formed the majority of the foundation of my thought development, it was talking with the students about their realities and lived experiences of

this research that ultimately brought the interconnectedness of the micro and macro out while also imbuing the work with meaning and spirit.

I would like to acknowledge these students, and express my deep gratitude for their words. They took the time and energy to share stories filled with deep emotion and learnings, and I know from experience how precious this gift is. Sharing our truth is powerful, but it is powerful because it means moving through our vulnerabilities and fears to feel brave enough to share with someone. I am honoured that these students felt safe enough with me to share all they did, and I pray that I have in turn honoured them by sharing their words in a good way.

I had to consider how to do this for a long time, as I was aware that I was taking something oral and putting it on the page, editing it down to make it easier to read. There are power relations involved in doing these things as a researcher. But as Archibald (2008) says, we must adapt our teachings to new environments, and in an appropriate way, take what we need and share it with those who will benefit. Writing the story down can decrease its impact, as the life of the story comes from the interaction of speaker and listener. However, even if I recorded a video of the interview, it will never be the same as actually being in the room at the time of the interview. There is an energy sharing, or spiritual reciprocity (Iseke, 2013) that happens between the listener and speaker that cannot be replicated. And I believe there is space for Indigenous researchers to honour their own processes based on where they are at on their journey. As Chief Dan George said in his speech, *A Lament for Confederation*, “I shall grab the instruments of the white man’s success – his education, his skills, and with these new tools I shall build my race into the proudest segment of your society” (APTN National News, 2017).

I find I need multiple ways of processing large concepts in order to work through my thinking and integrate my learnings in a deeper way. Transcribing, editing, and re-editing the words of the students allowed me to slow my thinking down and see the connections with the research and my own experiences, much like the process of weaving slowly reveals the entire piece. I have found that engaging with the stories of the students in this way has allowed me to look at my own story in a new way. By seeing our connections, I could also see how our stories were connected to the larger picture of our history and present of colonialism. It helped to know I was not alone in this experience, and it further reflects how we are all connected.

In storytelling, listeners can also find validation in their own lives by relating their experiences to the story. It is important to note that reading a story (much like listening to one) cannot be a passive thing (Archibald, 2008). The story needs to be engaged with somehow in order to work properly, so the reader thinks of the people or the story outside of the pages of the text itself. Often this spirit is lost in academic writing, so including large sections of the students' words was my attempt to allow for the reader to find their own engagement with the words and make meaning from it themselves. Including large sections allows for the reader to also interpret for themselves, and reveals more about the person's language and perspectives, and how they are situated.

Historically, research has been a one-sided, extractive process done *on* or *to* Indigenous peoples with (Smith, 1999). Researchers editing down and "repackaging" the words simply continues the colonization process by extracting Indigenous knowledge and categorizing it according to colonial standards. This process silenced Indigenous peoples, making their truths and stories invisible to the general population. Including as much of the students' stories as possible in a piece of scholarly writing helps move away from this western research

paradigm and brings Indigenous ways of knowledge creation, including reciprocity and holistic learning, into the academic realm (Geia, Hayes, & Usher, 2013). Given how Indigenous peoples have been silenced in academia for so long, I believe there is room to try and make up for that paucity by privileging the words of Indigenous students. Using storytelling in this way means I am able to use an Indigenous methodology to work with Indigenous peoples, rather than imposing a western methodology.

Additionally, each of the students (myself included) identified a culture of silence and silencing in their families, with the journey through post-secondary providing them with some of the physical and mental space, as well as the words, to end that toxic cycle. I know that graduate studies has done that for me, because it gave me the space and ability to look into my family history within the broader context of Canada's history of colonialism. If I didn't have the chance to learn these things, I would not have gained an understanding of why my behaviour and experiences, and my family's, are the way that they are. And now I have the space to share those learnings here, allowing me to further process them in the context of my current life experiences. Although I am aware the journey is long for me still, my new awareness of my life allows me to make different choices. Choices my mother and her mother did not have. I can also pass these learnings to my children, so they hopefully will have the tools at an even younger age.

Iseke (2013, pp. 570-1) notes how stories around colonization and residential schools help take listeners through the experience in order to "support change and transformation." In Latin America listening to or reading testimony means one is bearing witness to injustices through words (Caxaj 2015). Students sharing their stories of colonization in schools can help university faculty and staff walk through the student experiences better, bear witness to their experiences, and hopefully "support change and transformation" in the institution.

Stories can help us reconnect to ourselves by learning from the life lessons contained within the words, and guide us on our journey.

Also, by focusing on the stories of the students and learning from their perspectives on how their identity has been impacted by the colonial education system, it questions “the imposition of colonial histories on our communities” (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005, p. 139). In order to heal from our histories, the focus needs to be on the truths of the community of students and the students’ home communities and families. Their stories remind us that the impacts of colonialism are not abstract concepts or events that happened in a frozen past; the impacts are still being felt and dealt with by Indigenous students today. Our stories are deeply connected with the stories and experiences of our ancestors, and our words carry their experiences as well as our own (Geia, Hayes, & Usher, 2013). By bringing these stories out, the voices of our ancestors are also acknowledged, heard, and learned from. It helps heal the colonial wounds of our ancestors, thus also healing our own wounds today. My mother taught me that as we heal now, we not only heal ourselves, but also our grandchildren as well as our ancestors.

However, as Corntassel, Chaw-win-is, & T’lakwadzi noted (2009), Indigenous storytelling also means acknowledging how these stories fit into the larger picture of colonialism. They argue that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission process of using storytelling was focusing on determining financial compensation for residential school experiences, focusing on forgiveness and the relationship with the state. This ignores the larger issue of colonialism, including the fact that in this province most of us are on unceded Indigenous territories. The issues of the students cannot be separated out from the fact that in this post-secondary institution we are on unceded Syilx territory with a history and present of colonialism. The stories of the students then also act as a way to resist this colonialism by

calling the institution to task on these issues, and showing how it is not just about the students' time at school, it is also about their families, homelands, and communities.

2.4 Methods

2.4.1 Selection of participants

As I had the privilege of working for Aboriginal Programs and Services (APS), I knew the best way to find students was to meet with the Director to discuss a plan. After several discussions we felt the best way to recruit students was to email several from various faculties and years. Students are very busy, and Adrienne has the knowledge of which students would be most able to fit something like an interview into their already full schedules. Although western research tends to encourage approaches that will target a large number of students to elicit a more random sample group, such as posters and blanket emails, I knew from past experience at APS it is very difficult to get Indigenous students to respond to such calls. Although I did try to have a talking circle to invite students to help guide the research very early on, and have it be a way of recruiting individual interview participants, no one attended. I suspect this was because of the students' busy schedules and the fact that I had not worked in APS for a while, so fewer students knew me personally anymore. However, students who know Adrienne respect and appreciate her and her work; she is one of the hardest working people I have ever met, and one of the most caring. If she supported my research the students would be much more likely to want to work with me.

Even with our targeted approach it was initially difficult to find students who were able to participate, but eventually Damyn, Violet, Sarah, and Hailey agreed to work with me. Adrienne contacted each student individually with a Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) approved email I had written, briefly outlining the research scope and inviting the student to participate in an interview with me. An attachment with the details of the

background of the research, the benefits and potential risks, as well as issues around privacy and ethics was also provided. Students were asked to contact me directly via email or phone to confirm their interest, and from that point communication happened directly between the student and me.

In past years, the slow process of finding students would have caused me great anxiety. But at this point I was able to remind myself to trust the process, and trust that the right students would come along when the time was right. And I was right; each student comes from a unique background that is also representative of many truths of Indigenous students across Canada, although it is important to note that they do not and cannot speak for all of the perspectives given the innumerable experiences of Indigenous peoples in this country.

2.4.2 Interview procedures

Given the busy schedules students have, I tried to be flexible in where and when I met them, offering them the option to choose what suited their needs best. Two students chose to meet me in the Aboriginal Centre board room, one met me in a coffee shop near where she worked most days, and one invited me to her house. For the first several minutes of our meetings the student and I would make small talk, catching up on how things were with school and life. After I explained the background and goals of my research in more detail, I provided them with the consent form that detailed out any risks, benefits, and time commitments. I also gave them the option to remain anonymous in the work, although none elected to do so despite being informed of the risks. I was not surprised by this. I was taught that we are responsible for our words, so asking to be anonymous is like trying to get out of that responsibility. We must own our words, as they have an impact on others. As Evans (2004, p.72) notes: “In qualitative branches of sociology, history, anthropology, sociology, or

Indigenous studies, and especially in the context of much community centred research, anonymity can obscure community authority and voice, and the intent of the principle above is undone.” Allowing students to use their own name means their voices are heard and they can see themselves reflected in the research. If the research itself is ethical from an Indigenous perspective, there is no need to hide one’s identity and story.

After the student consented to being audio recorded, I asked the them to introduce themselves before beginning my questions. Although I had a interview schedule to guide the interview, often our conversation would diverge, enriching the story. It was important to keep the interview informal, like a conversation, as formal interviews often do not provide enough space for emotion and deep sharing. I knew each of these students in some capacity from my work with APS and I respect and care for each of them, so to act as a western researcher would be insulting to our relationship and would make the interview much less meaningful. I had to be a good listener in this process. It is the responsibility of the listener to attend to the story-teller, and look for the layers of meaning within each word. Along with each word was a corresponding energy, emotion, and non-verbal cue that added to the meaning of the story. It also meant that the student was truly sharing something with me; they were giving of themselves, making it important for me to do the same. When it was appropriate I would share a short story to show I connected with their story and was listening, without taking up so much space as to make it about me. This creates a reciprocity in the relationship, rather than extracting information in a one-sided relationship (Smith, 1999). Sharing our vulnerabilities and truths honoured our relationship. I did not judge the stories of the students, as I believe we each have our own paths to walk. Given that we each have our own truth based on our individual histories, it is not for me to say my perspective is better or

worse, or more right or wrong, than theirs. I honour each of these students for their journey, and for their strength to keep learning and moving ahead.

Once the interview was complete, I thanked them for sharing their story with me, and again offered them the chance to be anonymous. This offer was again declined. I closed by telling them I would follow-up with the transcription for their approval, and later an invitation to a talking circle and my defense.

2.4.3 Talking Circle

The talking circle was meant to act as a check on my research and my perspective of how it integrated with the interviews. I wanted to ensure the students had the option to guide me, so their words were represented better. Unfortunately, Damyn was unable to participate, but I was grateful the other three students were able to join me. I brought snacks and coffee to the Aboriginal Centre one Saturday, excited to catch up with the students after so long. It was a long journey to get me to the talking circle, and a lot had changed for everyone. I provided an overview of my research again, and an update on where my thinking had progressed since I last talked with them. I again received consent to audio record the conversation, and then I asked everyone to introduce themselves. Similar to the interviews, I did have a list of questions to ask, but often our conversation would wind naturally through the questions or find new directions. Personally, I found the experience to be rejuvenating as each student bravely shared their stories and their growth over the intervening months. This time I emailed the consent form to the students, who in turn signed, scanned, and returned them, each again choosing not to be anonymous.

2.4.4 Interpretation of the Stories (data analysis)

Once the interview was finished, I transcribed it in its entirety, including all the “ums,” “yeahs,” and “rights.” I have heard other graduate students register their dislike for transcribing, but I found the process to be quite enjoyable. It was certainly as time-consuming as I had heard, but it allowed me to connect with the stories of the students in a new and deeper way. As I listened and re-listened to the recordings, I had a chance to reflect on what they had said, finding connections to what I had read or experienced in my own life. At times I had to walk away from the recordings for days at a time while I pondered a particular section. Sometimes I had to walk away as I would find a connection to my life and had to suddenly incorporate a new understanding of myself. It was a healing process for me in many ways.

This first draft of the interview was true to the story the student told in that it was a verbatim transcription. I was hesitant to edit the transcription at all in order to stay true to the words of the students, but after a conversation with my supervisor I decided to give it a try. Often participants feel self-conscious seeing their words represented on paper, as reading one’s words is much different than speaking them. When speaking our brains don’t worry much about an extra “um” or “like,” but reading them can make us feel awkward. I know I personally was aghast at hearing myself in the recordings. In order to try and treat the students’ words with as much respect as possible, I prayed and smudged before editing, asking to be guided so I did not lose the spirit of the stories. Once I had edited it down to a point I felt the students’ stories flowed while still maintained the essence of what they were saying, I sent it to them for review and approval.

I found it difficult to code the interviews in a traditional western manner, as the stories were intricately woven, with threads connecting concepts and histories throughout.

Using a western way of analyzing the work would be an act of colonization, and would move me away from my intention of using Indigenous methods. Battiste (2000) refers to this as cognitive imperialism. Absolon (2011) used the term “making meaning” rather than “data analysis,” as most Indigenous processes make meaning of what has been gathered before sharing with the community. Initially I tried to find the themes, and although there certainly are themes to these stories, I did not feel right attempting to code them with a program. Again I prayed, asking to be shown the best way to honour the words of the students in this work. I also returned to the role of an engaged listener, or this time an engaged reader, in order to find the meanings contained within the stories. The interviews did tend to follow the general questions I had developed, which were based on some of the themes that had come up during the Indigenous Contextual Review. I decided to use these themes to examine the stories, giving me seven broad topics. From there I was able to pull out the threads that connected the stories together and grouped them into themes that would inform the direction of the recommendations.

2.5 Indigenous Contextual Review

In the next chapter I present my Indigenous contextual review, where I explore my relationship with the literature.

Chapter Three – Indigenous Contextual Review

3.1 Why an Indigenous Contextual Review?

In this section I explain why I decided to avoid doing a more standard Western literature review, and why doing an Indigenous Contextual Review makes more sense for me.

When I first began to think about my thesis, I struggled with the idea of a literature review. I didn't understand what it even was, despite reading several definitions and examining other's work. However, after experiencing that feeling in other areas of my education, I now understand that when I feel that way it is because that path (or method, theory, etc.) doesn't make sense for me, and I must stay on the path that reflects my personal x^wməθk^wəyəm values.

I do not mean to disrespect anyone's preferred way of doing a literature review, but I cannot follow a process that is built on colonial and patriarchal foundations, and denies my spirit. When Chief Dan George delivered his centennial speech he said we would use the tools of the white man's success, but he didn't mean conform to their education and assimilate (APTN National News, 2017). He meant take the tools of education and make them our own, and then use those tools to help build up our people using our ways. We have always done this. Buffalo Bird Woman's peoples in the early 1900s used metal tools brought by colonizers in their gardens, which they still farmed following their deeply-rooted traditions (Wilson, 1987). To build ourselves up the colonial ways must be challenged using their own tools with our own adaptations. Denying our spirit is part of the problem with the colonial education system as well. Denying what our spirit tells us only causes us to become torn apart or angry. Education must allow space for our spirits in the research process. It must allow for our thought processes, as well as our ways of knowing and doing.

Dion Kaszas, a Nlaka'pamux man, recently completed his Master of Arts degree at the same institution I attend. Rather than construct a “traditional” literature review, Kaszas (2018) chose to tell the story of his relationship with the literature and other learnings from outside of the academy and blended it with the story of how he grew as a scholar. When I read it, I was struck by how beautiful that idea was. Rather than a literature review with predetermined boundaries as to what constitutes “academic,” he was acknowledging and sharing *all* the processes by which he arrived at his current understanding and awareness. For me, the story of how you got to be where you are through your relationships makes sense as it situates your knowledge, and acknowledges where you got your information that led you to the conclusions you came to in a deep, meaningful way. It incorporates the whole picture of relationships woven together.

As Wilson (2008) notes, we cannot really *know* anything, as knowledge only belongs to the universe. All we can do is interpret what is seen. We can learn through our relationship with what we see, interpret it through our own internal filters of life experiences, and then try and share that interpretation with others through our words. Given all the layers of interpretation happening as a result of these relationships, it would only make sense for the person sharing their learnings to use their most familiar method of doing so. For some the literature review might be the way, but for me I feel the need to write out the story of my journey through my master’s program. It will help me process the journey, and it will also situate myself to help the reader see where I am coming from, illustrate (I hope) my understanding of the literature, how it relates to the teachings of the students’ stories, and what I have learned from this experience. I also will share what I believe we can all learn from these interwoven stories, and what we can do to grow and change as a result.

Following this path also keeps my work in alignment with my research framework of the spindle whorl. It reminds me to be balanced and present, while taking in all the experiences around me, as is what happens while gathering the wool, and then bringing it back to spin. It reminds me to stay connected to the earth and to my spirit, as they are guiding me if I listen. While spinning the spinner can enter a meditative state where levels of consciousness can connect together, and spirit and heart guide the hands and head. Connecting with our spirit allows us to also remember our connection with the Universe, Mother Earth, and one another, and lets the collective wisdom flow through our bodies to our work. It is part of doing work in a good way. This process of storying my relationship with my research situations then is the spinning process. It also means that it must incorporate the literature itself (i.e. various academic works such as journal articles, library books, theses, dissertations), *and* the less tangible materials like stories, lessons from the earth, animals, and spirits, and strengthening relationships and interweavings between all things.

The process of spinning the wool may be done as an individual, but it shows the connections that come together in the weaving itself. All of the small individual fibres are spun together to create a long strand, and these strands are then woven together to make the blanket. Spinning also shows how many things (the spindle, the whorl, the spinner, and the wool) must work together to create something that is both beautiful and useful. As a researcher, it is my task to bring together the research and the individual stories shared with me to create something that is useful. It is up to the spinner to take the small fibres and spin them together, and later to weave them together. It is my responsibility to take the knowledge that is shared with me and figure out what it means, much in the same way as the listener must figure out the meaning in a story (Archibald, 2008). The listener must be centred and go within, much as the spinner does. Stories and spinning also teach us to be patient. These

lessons must also be part of the framework in order to bring the knowledge from the students and academic research together. Without patience, things can be overlooked and mistakes can be made in interpreting research. This means the process of gathering my research was similar to gathering the wool and listening to the stories of the Elders, and the lessons from the land. Now as I write I am bringing all these threads together as the spinner does, so the stories and lessons are now twisted together and have become a part of each other. Then this spun wool, or research through writing this section, then becomes the materials for the weaving. As I wrote out my experiences and learnings in each year, I noticed I touched on the same themes repeatedly as I learned about them in more depth as a result of my experiences and readings.

In section 2 I will share the of developing a relationship with the research (i.e. literature and so forth), and in section 2b I will provide you with the story itself. Section 3 will be about bringing this information into myself and what happened as a result of this, finally leading to the last section where I bring the information I have gathered and what I have incorporated into myself together in a new direction to follow up on (the weaving itself).

3.2 Gathering the Wool, Sharing Stories, Making Connections

Weaving required a lot of wool to be gathered. As mentioned above the Elders, women, and children worked together to gather the wool the goats had left behind on branches or bushes, stomp it down into the baskets, and clean it and each other of debris. As this often took a long time, it was an opportunity for Elders to pass on their knowledge and to strengthen relationships between themselves and the other generations. Education was not

something done during set hours; the approach was more holistic and experiential, woven throughout daily life.

Much as the gathering process for wool, the gathering of research and interviews requires collaboration, relationship building, sharing of knowledge, patience, time, and thought. Bringing together the voices of students with research in a good way requires a focus on community and connections in order to build something that will work for Indigenous students.

Examining the literature means I must allow the threads of stories and experiences I gathered over the past several years to be brought together to create something useful. This is a challenging prospect in some ways for me, as it means sharing myself and being vulnerable, something not usually done in academia. But I believe it is critical I incorporate my own story and emotions into this work. Western academia has generally not served Indigenous peoples well, and if that is going to change space must be created for Indigenous perspectives on what constitutes as wisdom and knowledge to be respected and allowed to thrive. That means challenging the idea that emotion and spirit do not belong in the academy. If I am going to be taken seriously by my ancestors and my children's children, then I need to be true to my spirit, while balancing it with the physical, emotional, and mental.

Incorporating portions of my story in the work will help situate myself better, as I have made very personal choices in my research based on my own life experiences and worldview. Grounding myself in my own experiences and beliefs leaves room for the many truths of others, rather than operating under the idea of a universal truth (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). Leaving space for the truths of others honours and validates each individual.

For me the gathering process has been lengthy, and often all-consuming. It seemed as if most of the things happening in my life were all conspiring against me; it was often too much and I often found myself stuck. Becoming a whole person was my focus, and it became clear early on that I had a *long* way to go to come back to myself. I recognized that despite my privilege, I did not escape the trauma. What then did that say for those Indigenous peoples who have less privilege than me? If it has been like this for me, I cannot begin to imagine what it is like for others. Eventually I had to accept that my journey through school would be lengthy as I was constantly grappling with emotions outside of the sphere of academia, yet they impacted my studies in unexpected ways nonetheless. Although I didn't realize it initially, I have come to realize it was all teaching me about myself and how my history and traumas, and the histories and traumas of my parents and grandparents as a result of colonization, came together and coloured my entire existence. It coloured my journey through education and I had no idea of the depths of how it impacted my behaviours in life. Without the chance to explore this, I would have been forever imprisoned by these traumas. Moving through all of this was not easy, and it changed my life completely. These years have been the most challenging of my adult life and I have doubted my decision to continue numerous times each month, sometimes each week. But gradually things are beginning to change for me, and I am beginning to not only find some direction with my research, but also within myself.

3.2.1 My Story

The decision to return to school was a long one, as most decisions are for me, but I knew I had to do something to change my life. As mentioned in chapter one, I was in an unhappy place and was beginning to feel a desperate need to make a change in my life, and I always figured education was the best way for me to change. With the support of my then-

husband Ryan, I worked up the courage to apply to graduate studies, with the hopes of examining Indigenous identity in post-secondary. In hindsight, this return to school was part of a cascade of changes in my life that all seemed to be working together, even if at the time it felt like I was falling apart.

My course work was spread over a couple of years due to my changing personal life and juggling child care for my young children. Each of the courses I took was influential in very different ways, and laid the foundations for me to build my thinking off of. Even the order I took my courses in helped build my understanding of the literature.

The qualitative methodologies course was a useful overview of various ways of doing research. At this point I had not explored much around Indigenous methodologies, but I had read enough to know of their existence, and I was beginning to feel stronger in myself and beginning to trust the teachings I was given as a youth. Through this course it became clear using an Indigenous methodology was the only path forward for me. This was also the first course since my undergraduate years where I was expected by the class, and initially the professor, to comment on any and all Indigenous issues. I was very taken aback by this, and I felt unprepared to deal with it. I remember feeling like I was back in my grade four classroom again, singled out and expected to perform for the class's benefit. Ryan did not know how to support me, and it was hurtful to have to explain to him why these situations were difficult for me and why it is not fair that Indigenous students always must be the one to do the extra emotional labour. My mother says it's strange how Indigenous students are expected to know everything about their people and their culture, when it was against the law to be taught these things for so many years. Fortunately, some of the other students in the class were very supportive and even apologized for not stepping in earlier to help. They encouraged me to speak with the professor, which required me facing my fear of older, white

men in positions of power. The professor did acknowledge the imbalance and offered to speak to the class about some of the Indigenous historical context in this country for those in class who may be unaware of it, which helped a little.

Indigenous Critical Theory and Praxis was an altering course for me. Often I felt lost, but it opened up my thinking to help me see some of the connections between Indigenous peoples and colonization internationally, and how these relationships played out in my everyday life. Seeing how these things are connected through ongoing colonialism was a huge revelation to me. I was now beginning to see how colonization operated, and how it continues to operate to this day through our governments and policies to dictate how Indigenous peoples' lives will be lived on our own land. Or rather, on the small parcel of reserve land we were "given" or purchased on our own, instead of the vast territory we once were a part of as my mother reminded me.

But I also could see how it was having an impact on the settlers themselves. Ryan learned a lot as I went through this course work because I would often process my learnings with him. However, it was hard for him because it meant challenging his own internal colonization, and confronting his own colonial behaviours and beliefs he had unconsciously developed over the years. Through our discussions I realized how colonization seems to have been designed through fear and hurt, and tends to cause fear and hurt as a result. To me it seemed as though colonial behaviours weren't working for anyone. As my professor, Dr. Margo Tamez said, the system evicts humanity. I don't think anyone can feel good when that is how things operate.

For this course I was asked to do an embodiment exercise to represent my work. I decided to make a weaving as I thought the metaphor really fit for me. This was prior to creating my theoretical framework, so it is interesting to reflect back and see how I was led

on this path. I knew very little about the history and practice of weaving in my community, which is a direct result of my limited connections to my community because of colonization and my family situation. This weaving was symbolic of my desire to reconnect with my community and my spirit. Each thread, pattern, and mistake were all connected from start to finish, and all worked together to create the final weaving. This is not unlike how our Indigenous and non-Indigenous histories are woven together, and all of our imperfections, pain, and joy work to create our realities today. Ryan built me a loom, my mother sent me wool and instructions to prepare it for weaving, and my children helped treat the wool. As soon as I could, I made a trip to Vancouver so my mother could show me different techniques. We talked about when she learned weaving and stories from when she was young. I later realized how it wasn't really the weaving that was the embodiment project, it was me. I was working on decolonizing myself, reconnecting with my Indigenous identity, and trying to live my life as a whole person again.

I attended the Indigenous Graduate Student Symposium at UBC Vancouver that year and met my Uncle Shane Pointe, an Elder. During the conference he stressed to us how important it was for each of us to become a whole person in order to do our research in a good way. We had to learn to bring our mind, body, spirit, and heart together in a balanced way, and start healing. I felt the truth of that settle inside of me. I took this message to heart, and started immediately working on becoming that whole person. This graduate process for me would be about re-membling (as Dr. Tamez put it), decolonization, and empowerment for myself, but my hope was that this would ripple outwards through student interviews and my thesis in order to help other students as well.

The second year I was excited to take a course with Dr. Jeannette Armstrong as I deeply respect her work both in community and in academia. In class she often stressed how

language came from the land, just as the people did, and I felt I understood what she meant. My mom told me her grandpa used to tell her this about languages when she was small, much as the salmon have different scale patterns depending on what creek they were born in. If you listen you can hear the land in the words. A song in nsyilxcən sounds (to me) like the dry, slow growing hills and the open, sunny skies, while a song in hənqəminəm sounds like the deep river and the cedar. And given how our blood and bones are made of the land, it makes sense the people who speak the languages change with the land as well. This course helped firm my belief in what I was taught growing up about relationships and reciprocity, and in the importance of using an Indigenous approach to ethics and methodology for my research. I also realized that I was doing this research as a way to prove to myself that my beliefs have a place and are valid, and that I have a place and am valid. Seeing Indigenous ways of knowing being given a place in the university finally helped me begin to shed the idea that my beliefs, ways of thinking, and my general existence did not belong.

I took Dr. Sabre Cherkowski's Diversity in Education course alongside Dr. Armstrong's course, which made for an interesting term. The experiences in this course proved to me that although much change and growth is needed in the institution, it is slowly happening in some areas. I cannot thank the professor of that course enough either, as she proved to be an ally who was not afraid to step in when the situation called for it. During a small group discussion, a non-Indigenous student asked me (the only Indigenous student) a question based on a very stereotypical belief of Indigenous peoples. I remember being so taken aback I nearly laughed because we were in a class on diversity in the classroom, but I have no idea what my actual response was as these situations often make me shut down inside. Fortunately, the professor overheard. She intervened, but I no longer remember what she said. I had to excuse myself and went to the bathroom to collect myself. The professor

checked in with me during a break to see how I was doing, apologized for not stopping it sooner, and told me she was going to speak to the student about it (which she did, and she checked in with me afterwards as well). She asked me if I wanted him to apologize to me, and I declined, but really appreciated being given the option. I felt like the professor handled it in such a good way, the situation that was initially so triggering for me ended up being something that gave me hope in the idea of “allies.” It ended up being a good learning opportunity for me, and I could see that some people are willfully challenging the colonial ways of doing things. The course also helped me see how the education system was set up in order to create my experiences, how education was not neutral politically, how often students are blamed for their experiences rather than the system or teachers, and how it was created and guided by white men in order to maintain the status quo in our society.

3.2.2 Impacts and Influences of Colonial Practices on Indigenous Peoples

My journey through the literature was winding, as I read both academic and non-academic literature. These readings not only shaped my thinking and understanding of Indigenous identity and the colonial education system, but also of myself and how I became the person I am today in relation to Indigenous identity and colonial systems. I discovered the depths of my internalized colonization and began the journey to decolonize myself. These readings also helped me see how connected my story is with those of the students I interviewed, friends, family, and many other Indigenous peoples I encountered or read about.

Broad Concepts and Foundations

My first course was directed studies with my supervisor, who steered me to readings to help inform my understanding of broad concepts like subjectivity versus objectivity, Indigenous methodologies, and identity and post-secondary. This was instrumental in getting

me back into academic reading, and showed me how much research had changed since I did my undergraduate course readings.

Reading Haraway's *Situated knowledges* (1989) article jarred me as I didn't know academic writing like this existed. It affirmed for me how we cannot examine all there is in the world according to one standard, and so there is room for subjective knowledges to be explored, which will lead to a greater and better understanding of the world. I used to believe this when I was young, but gradually this belief was replaced with one that valued western ways and knowledge as the ultimate truth. But Haraway's work aligned with my initial belief that our views on the world all have a place, and it gave me permission to start to rework my colonized belief system.

Researchers from my institution influenced my thinking early on in my readings. Armstrong (2005) is a Syilx Elder, artist, and academic who reminded me of the importance of bringing community together in a state of wholeness, and it is this interconnection between us and the land that sustains us. For her a true democracy is a collaboration where everyone has rights, and the needs of all species are considered before decisions are made. Evans, Hole, Berg, and Hutchinson (2009) got me thinking about different methodologies working together in order to better serve Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous researchers together, and introduced me to the idea of using a more critical perspective on white society.

The larger shift happened when I read Wilson's *Research is Ceremony* (2008) and Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999). Right there, in academic books, were Indigenous ways of knowing that I had been raised with being used as legitimate methods of education and research. These works were pivotal in my decolonization, as until this point I did not truly believe that what my mother taught me had a place in the "real" world. School, friends, and the media had taught me to believe that my mom was living in the past, or didn't

truly understand the world. In my last years of high school and the start of my undergraduate program I became hardened to her ways, and turned to biology, chemistry, and physics to explain things. However, as I mentioned, I became unhappy in the sciences and did not know why. I could now see it was because the ways of research in the academy did not fit with what I truly believed. Finding academic research supporting my mother's ways was a relief. I regretted and mourned my years of denying my mother and her ways, but I was also finally seeing how I could survive in graduate school. I could do research and stay true to Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

Wilson (2008) noted how knowledge belongs to the universe, rather than an individual; therefore, the researcher can only interpret experiences based on his/her positioning in the world. Our reality then is based on how our all of our relationships and connections come together. Through the ceremony of my research I have thoughtfully chosen my approach to the work and have developed a relationship with the ideas. This approach to research felt good to me, as it meant using all parts of myself rather than just my brain. Wilson also spoke of how all things are related and interconnected, something my mother often spoke of when I was young. She would point out these connections in our everyday experiences as they were more than just coincidences in her eyes, they were a result of us all being spiritually connected with all humans, animals, plants, the earth, and the universe. I have tried to approach my research as something that is not just about what I am doing to graduate and get a job, but as something that will impact others given our interconnections. I have also approached this process as something that is more than just about reading the research and interviewing students, but as something that meant changing who I am to become a better person in the end.

Kovach's (2009) *Indigenous Methodologies* introduced me to Indigenous methodologies, and the idea of having a research framework rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing was very exciting. This piece also helped affirm my belief in the validity of inward knowing in Indigenous academic writing, but also of its validity in life in general.

Battiste and Henderson's (2000) preface, introduction, and Chapter Two in *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge* was a passionate argument for an Indigenous renaissance to reclaim and revitalize Indigenous education as part of the decolonization process, as to date the western curricula has been a tool designed to silence the perspectives of the "other." This piece also introduced me to the idea of western knowledge taking or absorbing whatever it wants/needs from Indigenous knowledge in order to solve the problems created by the western world. I could see this everywhere, but didn't have the framework to help me understand it. The ubiquitous nature of colonization means that it is everywhere, in all things, and I could finally see this.

The depths of my internal colonization began to be revealed to me as I worked through my readings, which hurt deeply to experience. I felt ashamed to have given up on what my mother taught me. It hurt to shut that part of me down, and reconnecting with it meant dealing with those feelings of shame, guilt, and grief. Battiste (2000) wrote about the process of cognitive imperialism and cultural racism, whereby the dominant society not only imposes their worldviews on others, but also sets its own worldviews as the only acceptable way of thinking while discrediting others. This is exactly how our education system works in this country. Western values, histories, and perspectives are taught to children and young adults while the values, histories, and perspectives of the Indigenous peoples of the land are either presented through a very narrow lens, or they are ignored entirely. Knowledge about Indigenous peoples is based on work from western academics, not the Indigenous peoples

themselves (Smith, 1999). Cultural racism cannot empower Indigenous identity as Indigenous worldviews are not seen as valid and are misunderstood. No wonder I struggled to see myself while I was in school. Gradually what my mother taught me about connection, spirituality, and relationships was replaced by teachings from the colonizer's viewpoint, and who I was as a person disappeared. It was all part of a plan; it was all part of colonization. When I read this it helped me forgive myself for turning my back on my mother's ways, and I realized I needed to prioritize Indigenous perspectives and methodologies so my children didn't have to make the same choices I did. It also showed me that I had a long journey to reverse the damage of my own internal colonization.

Beginning to explore identity

When I began to explore the concept of Indigenous identity I quickly saw how complex it is in the country now known as Canada. Identity can be seen through different facets such as self-identity, community identity, external identity, and measuring identity (Weaver, 2001). It is something shaped through our social interactions, shared history, and our individual historical experiences, so it is constantly changing as a result. It is shaped by how we see ourselves and how others see us, is context dependent, and is a lifelong process. Weaver (2001) discussed how an identity does not exist until it is created, and different definitions of the identity (such as those formed by governments, stereotypes, and the people themselves) can conflict with one another. Prior to contact, there was no need for Indigenous peoples to identify as such, and many communities with little contact with white culture still do not see a need for this division (Restoule, 2000). This means that until settlers arrived, "Indians" did not exist.

In order for early colonizers to hold the power and control the land it was necessary to clearly separate themselves from the Indigenous peoples and place themselves in a social hierarchy (that did not exist) with Indigenous peoples. This desire to categorize and rank races on a scale stems from Western scientific ways of knowing that embraces concepts like dualism (right/wrong, on/off, black/white, better/worse, man/woman), universal truths, objectivity, linear time, and the dominance of man over nature (Frideres, 2011). Colonization pushes the idea that there are inferior races that require domination and carefully builds the identity of the colonized in a way that maintains this inferiority (Cote-Meek, 2010). In addition, “racial classifications played a central role in grounding, justifying, and assessing colonial projects...[and v]arious taxonomies of classification were used to grade or rank sociality in a manner that anointed European groups “civilized” (read: superior) and placed Indigenous peoples and others somewhere below...” (Andersen, 2014, p. 30).

This set of beliefs is what the colonizers use to justify removing Indigenous peoples from their lands and to rationalize all of the other forms of ongoing violence. “Colonizers are most concerned and threatened by Indigenous peoples of the land because Indigenous peoples have real ties and claims to land and resources. Therefore, as peoples, they represent a significant threat to the colonial empire and in the minds of the colonist must be debased” (Cote-Meek, 2010, p. 95). During an Indigenous Studies class on September 18, 2014, the late Dr. Younging pointed to a series of western justifications used to acquire land including, but certainly not limited to:

- terra nullius: unoccupied land can be claimed. Canada was seen as nobody’s land, meaning Indigenous peoples are not seen as human beings to make this work

- manifest destiny: used to justify the spread of colonizers across North America as an inevitable process as it is the will of God
- Papal bulls: the pope issued edict demanding Indigenous peoples turn to the Christian faith, granting European colonizers permission to dominate the world's Indigenous peoples
- Social Darwinism: a theory that attempted to manipulate Darwin's laws of natural selection to show some races as superior to others.

Although initially Indigenous peoples were seen as military allies to the British, this began to change after 1812. British Parliament began to see itself as a guardian protecting its wards of Indigenous peoples, and a relationship based on equality between peoples was no longer necessary. Indians became legal wards who required protection and civilization into Western ways (Belanger, 2014). My mother says her grandpa said many of the new comers were people who had been abused themselves, and saw the “new world” and its abundance as a place to escape that. But in order to do so they became the abusers themselves, treating us like nothing because they were treated like nothing at home, killing to get what they want. Then they defended their actions, saying we could not care for ourselves so they could own us and our land.

Colonizers created the Indian identity, and created the definitions of who was and wasn't one, and how much of one they were (Sawchuk, 2001; Weaver 2001). At the same time as the Indian identity was being created, the identity of the colonizers was also being shaped. Colonial societies had to invent themselves in new lands that were often very different than their own homelands, and they had to do this with other colonizers they were not related to. The social institutions that define colonial society had to be invented, and they

had to justify why it was being done on someone else's land. "The very existence of white settler societies is therefore predicated on maintaining racial apartheid, on emphasizing racial difference, both white superiority and Native inferiority" (Lawrence, 2004, p. 48). Indians became the "other" in opposition to the white people, and our ability to identify ourselves was removed. Creating this identity also created the lens Indigenous people were and are viewed through (Frideres, 2008; Lawrence, 2003; Sawchuk, 2001). Vizenor (1994) notes that creating an "other" also fabricated a history for the west where culture was represented by unreal perceptions that became real. The Indigenous, or Indian, identity and definitions were created by the dominant society to own, control, and manipulate the Indian people (Brayboy 2004). Indians were either not represented in media, education, or policies at all or were represented by the false, created definitions of the colonizers (Vizenor 1994). Lawrence (2003) and Vizenor (1994) assert that these fabricated definitions not only control the lives of Indigenous people, they have also been replicated over time and created an understanding of Indigenous identity that has been accepted as "natural" by both the dominant society and Indigenous people. These arbitrary divisions have become internalized by Indigenous people, and many will use these imposed definitions against one another in an effort to have access to sparse resources (Lawrence, 2012). By identifying as Métis, Inuit, or First Nations Indigenous people are accepting a definition of otherness that was imposed by the colonizers (Sawchuk, 2001). As Weaver (2001) notes, our identity is shaped by how we view ourselves and by how others view us. This means that our identity is shaped by ourselves, but also by our communities, as well as the government's racist policies and laws, and the popular stereotypes.

Identity is a fluid, multi-faceted thing, where one can identify with smaller groups nested within the context of the larger group identity (Frideres, 2008). The boundaries

between groups become clear in the context of power and relationships, such as the relationships and power dynamics that exist between Indigenous peoples and colonizers. Whereas most people are allowed to move between identities, Indigenous peoples are consistently grouped as separate from the white person and viewed as the “other.” The dominant culture sees identity as unchanging through history (Restoule, 2000), so an Indian is always an Indian and can never be part of the dominant society. However, Frideres (2008) asserts that Indigenous identity moves between traditional and contemporary given how our worlds are interwoven, and there are many ways to express those identities today as a result. Some are strongly community-based while others are more individualistic, and given that it has gradually become more acceptable to identify as Indigenous, people may want to identify and express themselves in different ways that may not allow for total immersion in Indigenous culture. The caution here of course, is not to reduce the culture to consumable symbols while assimilating into the dominant culture.

The Indian Act

The main tool for creating the perceptions of Indigenous identity was the Indian Act. Bonita Lawrence’s *Real Indians* (2004) was very influential for me as it not only helped me more clearly understand the Indian Act as a tool of both the past and present colonizers, but it also helped me understand how my own life was impacted by this. Not surprisingly, the Indian Act controls Indian life in a very colonial way. Through the Indian Act the colonizers categorized and defined people in ways that had nothing to do with how Indigenous people saw themselves. It imposed an invented definition of identity on Indigenous peoples that set the parameters for how non-Indigenous people understand us and created a standardized identity that also shaped how we look at ourselves. The fact that these imposed definitions are now accepted as “normal,” are being used by Indigenous peoples, and are used against

one another is the truly insidious and tragic result of this Act (Restoule, 2000). Colonialism became internalized by the colonized, and often we accept our imbalanced relationship with the colonizer because we cannot see where our pain has come from (Cote-Meek, 2010).

The Act separated families from one another, separated individuals from their homelands by bringing gender into the process and attacking Indigenous women, forcing enfranchisement and assimilation, and creating Indian reserves with rules as to who can and cannot live there (Frideres, 2008; Lawrence, 2003; Lawrence, 2004; Sawchuk, 2001). Separating Indigenous peoples' connections to the land was essential for Canada to break self-organization and self-knowledge, and the Indian Act redefined how Indigenous peoples thought of themselves in order to appropriate the land. Dehumanizing identity legislation was central in shaping the process of colonization in Canada, as it made Indigenous people irrelevant in Canada's history and even denied the Indigenous peoples their own histories (Lawrence, 2004).

Gendering the Indian Act and Indigenous identity

The Indian Act influenced how we are perceived by others and ourselves and so how we are treated and treat one another. Many Indigenous nations are matriarchal societies, with women seen as givers of life and thus deeply connected to Mother Earth and her wisdom, and social groups fundamentally formed and understood through matrilineal and matrilineal relations. Although men were often chiefs, their words and actions were ultimately guided by the women. This is of course much different than the western ways, and in the minds of the colonizers had to be remedied. The Indian Act changed how we viewed and treated our women.

Lawrence (2004) helped me to understand how gender is a critical piece in the Indian Act. During the fur trade marriages between European men and Native women were accepted

as they helped the men survive and the trade succeed. Their children were also an important part of the success of the fur trade, and boundaries between races were not an issue. But in order to maintain social control it was necessary to categorize who was white and who was Indian, and which children were legitimate (white) citizens. Eventually, space also had to be created for white women in the home in order to have a society with more British values, so Native women were driven from their place in the fur trade. The women were also a threat because they knew the land was the only way to maintain society and future generations (Lawrence, 2004). The mixed-blood children of these women, who had likely been taught her ways, were also removed from white society and prevented from inheriting their father's property (which traditionally had usually belonged to the woman).

In 1850 Indianness was first defined in gendered terms, and the Gradual Enfranchisement Act in 1869 enfranchised women who married a man without status. If an Indian woman married someone outside of her community she could only belong to her husband's, thus redefining traditional marriage arrangements and forcing women away from their lands. This also attacked Indigenous communities' collective natures by separating families. Until 1951 Indian women who lost their status did not have the same rights as status women, but sometimes they were allowed to remain informal band members who could live on reserve and occasionally receive treaty monies. However, after 1951 these women were compulsorily enfranchised and so lost their property and monies. "The many ways in which Native women were rendered marginal in their communities by patriarchal colonial laws not only made it more difficult for them to challenge the tremendous disempowerment that loss of status represented – it made land theft much easier," (Lawrence, 2004, p.51). It was clear these laws were meant "to remove as many individuals as possible from Indianness and, as part of this process, to enforce Indianness as being solely a state of "racial purity" by

removing those children designated as “half-breed” from Indian communities,” (Lawrence, 2004, p.51).

In addition to this, punitive laws were created in the Indian Act around prostitution and intoxication. These laws targeted Native women, saying they were responsible for spreading “venereal disease among the police and officials in western Canada and therefore increasingly classified urban Aboriginal women as prostitutes within the criminal code after 1892.” (Lawrence, 2004, p.49) Women who lost their status and had to leave their communities were not absolved of the restrictions of the Indian Act. Definitions of Indianness were deliberately loose in the liquor section, and judges habitually punished non-Status women under the Act.

Lawrence (2004) goes on to say how colonial control gradually lessened for Native men after 1951, but increased for Native women, especially those who married non-Natives. The membership section of the Act became more and more elaborate, defining who was and who was not entitled to be a registered Indian. The male line of descent was emphasized as criteria for status, and women were seen as wards of their husbands. Children of enfranchised women were also enfranchised with their mothers, but with the amendment of the Indian Act (Bill C-31) beginning in 1985 (Government of Canada, 2018) they were reinstated (if the government could find them). This 116-year period between 1869 and 1985 saw 25,000 Indians lose their status and become alienated from their communities. In addition, the descendants of these enfranchised women also did not have status and usually never returned to their communities. According to Lawrence (2004) between one and two million Indians lost their status and their communities during this time period as a result. In 1985 there were only 350,000 registered Indians. The cultural implications of this bleeding off are huge.

Although about 100,000 Indians gained status back between 1985 and 1995 through Bill C-31, much damage had already been done.

In the 1960s Indigenous women began to deal with this loss of status by challenging the discrimination of the Indian Act. This challenge was not met without resistance from both the government and male-dominated band councils and organizations. Some have argued that gender discrimination was traditional in Native communities, but when legislation was first passed the objections communities raised showed the reverse was true. More likely is that our ideas of who is and isn't Native has been shaped by the Indian Act and gender discrimination has become normalized and internalized by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous society (Lawrence, 2003, 2004). Since the 1960s Bill C-31 (which allowed my mother to get her Status back) and Bill C-3 (which allowed me and my children to get Status) have attempted to deal with some of the discrimination, but colonial standards of identity are still pervasive in the Act.

Forcing our nations to move from matriarchal to patriarchal societies has caused so much hurt to our people. The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls campaign highlights how negative, colonial, stereotypical attitudes towards Indigenous women has created such a deep imbalance that we are literally dying because of it. This not only impacts our women, but our men as well. Our men have been fed a colonial view on what it means to be a man, warping their treatment of themselves and so everyone else.

The Métis

Métis people also have been lumped into one category by the government, despite their numerous histories and cultures (Sawchuk, 2001). Legault (2016) identified three discourses that inform Métis identity: racialized, ethno-historical, and political. Together, these discourses help create how Métis are seen by others, and how Métis see themselves.

Métis identity has a unique history, and as I am not Métis I can only comment on my own interpretation of what I have learned. As the fur trade relied on marriages to First Nations women, mixed-blood settlements with diverse communities were created, such as the historic Red River settlement (Lawrence, 2004). Categories of Indianness were not important to Indigenous peoples as intermarriages between half-breeds, Indians, and colonists meant communities experienced regular traffic in and out of Indianness. However, children of these marriages were eventually referred to by government officials as “half-breed” rather than as being considered “purely Indian”, which facilitated their exclusion from treaty rights. How the individual perceived themselves was generally not considered, leaving decisions on Indianness to be made based on stereotypes of painted faces, wild behaviour, and “pure blood.” Separating half-breeds from Indians let Canada ignore any fiduciary responsibility to communities without status, and started the belief that being an Indian and having Indian rights was tied with full-bloodedness. This colonial idea of biology and “pure bloodedness” being tied to culture led to Métis people having no land base or access to resources, believing that having more Indian blood made one more authentic and gave the individual more rights to their ancestors’ legacy (Legault, 2012).

This perception of Indianness ignores the range of mixed-blooded experiences, cultures, and histories, and forced mixed-blooded Indians to group together under a common identity of Métis “in order to survive as Indigenous people at all” (Lawrence, 2004, p. 93; Sawchuk, 2001). Indeed, many non-Status Indians have been seen as Métis (including myself occasionally growing up in Salmon Arm) due to their mixed ancestry and lack of status, and many have even taken Métis status. How Canada has regulated Indianness “has a central effect on how Métisness is understood, regardless of the various definitions adopted by Métis organizations in Canada” (Lawrence, 2004, p. 86). How Métis people and Indigenous

peoples in general identify themselves is disregarded by Canada in favour of western, colonial methods of identifying such as biology through paternal bloodlines in order to maintain racial divisions and continue to remove Indigenous rights to their own lands through arguments of pure-bloodedness.

In addition to the Indian Act's influence on Métis identity, other historical events and policies have also left their mark. Court cases and access to limited government funding have caused the definition of Métis to become more narrow, forgetting the cultural influence on identity and accepting the definition of otherness and identity the colonizer implemented (Sawchuk, 2001). Many Indigenous peoples as well as non-Indigenous people have also accepted some version of these colonial definitions of Métis identity, sometimes viewing Métis as a watered-down Indian or a hybrid. This denies Métis peoples authenticity as Indigenous peoples (Andersen, 2014). Legault (2016) asserts a defining characteristic of being Métis is being Indigenous. Métis values, cultural and spiritual practices, ways of knowing, and language also are part of Métis Indigeneity. However, "Depending on whether Indigenous people are being defined by themselves, their community, or others, they may possess some, all, or none of the characteristics that are used to measure their identity" (Legault, 2016, p. 109). Canada now includes Métis as one of the Aboriginal peoples under section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982.

There are several definitions of Métis identity, depending on who is defining it. Colonial definitions are also challenged by the peoples themselves within their local contexts (Legault, 2016). Métis politicians, organizations, and people sometimes cannot agree on a singular Métis definition. Some, looking at nationhood as the nation-state, call for the definition to be based strictly on connections to the Red River settlement or the Historic

Métis Nation, and proof of scrip from the 1870 Manitoba Act. Other organizations are more inclusive.

Residential schools

Unfortunately, a discussion around Indigenous identity would not be complete without residential schools. For many years, the Canadian government's policies on Indigenous peoples were meant to assimilate Indigenous peoples until they ceased to exist. Residential schools were an essential tool of this policy. Today there is much more dialogue and awareness about these government- and church-backed "schools" that were openly designed to "kill the Indian in the child" in order to better assimilate them into the fledgling Canadian society, absolve the government of responsibility to Indigenous peoples, and access their lands (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC], 2015). In order to more fully understand Indigenous identity this traumatic wound of cultural genocide must be explored as most (if not all) Indigenous people carry the hurt in their blood today. These institutions were critical in shaping the relationship between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous peoples in this country.

Lawrence (2004) discusses the depths the government went to in order to ensure Indigenous children attended, and the openly violent destruction of Indigenous language, culture, relationships, and interconnections through the most vulnerable of all, our children. Not surprisingly most Indigenous families had no interest in sending their children away from their communities to attend religious schools, so in 1894 the Indian Act made attendance mandatory. In some cases, the schools were a place for children who had lost family and community through the ravages of colonization. In other cases, children were removed from their communities by Indian Agents or priests. These schools were usually overcrowded, badly heated, and students were often undernourished. Administrators and

teachers were often indifferent, insensitive, hostile, and even sadistic. Education was often not effective in these schools, leaving children stripped of their language, culture, and family, and lacking support to deal with this trauma (TRC, 2015). The impacts of these atrocities are well documented through the TRC reports, and we are finally now acknowledging how this trauma and intergenerational trauma continues to play a role in our lives today. The physical, emotional, and sexual abuse were rampant, with some children dying either at school or in an attempt to escape (TRC, 2015).

In addition to the more overt acts of genocide there were the attacks on language and culture. By suppressing the language, oral tradition which would have passed down cultural identity and values was also suppressed. Students either completely lost (or rather, had it taken) their language, refused to speak it, or refused to teach it to others, often for the rest of their lives. The separation from community removed the students' connections to their home, and as planned, access to culture. Many former students never returned home, and frequently those who did were never the same, making it impossible for parents and grandparents to pass on their traditions. Family ties were devastated as some children from the same families were sent to different schools, and officials sometimes changed the names of the children and/or removed their name from their band so they could never go home (Lawrence, 2004; TRC, 2015). This separation of children from parents not only hurt the children, it also hurt their parents and relatives who could not protect the children, and it hurt their children's, children's, children. Many students experienced trauma in these schools and live with this trauma every day, with many former students turning to addiction to cope, and many have died violent deaths (Lawrence, 2004; Belanger, 2014).

The children's vulnerability was increased due to their separation from their families and lands. The shame, ridicule, and punishment they received for trying to connect with their

language or culture, made healing later in life through those traditional means almost impossible. Indianness was associated with this shame and pain, and the only way to avoid this shame and pain was to be silent and try to act white. Despite the violence on almost every level these schools were often the only childhood many kids ever knew.

I saw this pain in my grandma Grace often. She always claimed she could not remember how to speak *hə́nqəminə́m*, but was quick to correct me if I mispronounced a word I was trying to learn. When her siblings or cousins spoke to her in *hə́nqəminə́m* she would nod along with them or, occasionally if she thought no one was looking, quietly reply. When I was younger most of her children, with the exception of my mother, typically denied connections to our language and our old ways saying, “that’s not our way.” She never spoke of her time in residential schools to anyone except my mother, who in turn has also never shared that story with anyone.

More Topics to Consider

Although it is tempting to say that these issues are things of the past, the Indian Act is still governing the lives of Indigenous peoples today. It continues to play a role in the race-based issues Indigenous peoples must deal with every day. Colonialism is embedded in our systems and social structures, and it informs our laws and policies at all levels to this day.

There are many other issues to consider when looking at Indigenous history and identities. I have included a brief list here for the reader to explore, as they are very relevant to Indigenous identity and how the dominant society perceives us, though beyond the scope of this thesis:

- How colonialism impacted the Inuit.

- How colonialism influenced off-reserve, urban, and rural Indigenous populations.
- The Sixties Scoop and the Millennial Scoop: thousands of Indigenous children were, and continue to be, adopted to non-Indigenous families in other communities.
- Child Welfare and federal government non-compliance orders: the child welfare system is discriminatory and has caused deep harm to Indigenous community, and despite court orders to rectify this, the federal government has not complied.
- Media and popular culture portrayals (i.e. newspapers, journalists, movies, TV): Indigenous peoples are portrayed as savage and wild warriors, strong and silent squaws, dignified and frozen in the past, or drunks, addicts, and prostitutes benefitting off the system.
- Ongoing colonialism: Colonialism is part of our lives and is an undercurrent in our policies and laws, as they are what the nation was founded on. These attitudes influence and guide our social structures, education systems, and governments.
- Racism: from microaggressions to more obvious displays of racism both interpersonally and systemically.

Shame, Trauma, and Impacts on Identity

As this review has attempted to show so far, Indigenous peoples of this land have been greatly impacted by colonization. Since contact, Indigenous peoples have had to survive rampant diseases they had no immunity for, the loss of their lands and rights, residential

schools, media stereotypes, racism, the Sixties Scoop, and other forms of ongoing colonization. Although the RCAP and TRC reports both highlighted how these events have been historically traumatic for Indigenous peoples, I believe this trauma impacts Indigenous identity to this day.

Shame is a very powerful emotion, and has been referred to as the root of all harmful self-images (Kaufman, 1996). It is associated with depression, addiction, aggression, violence, and other mental health issues (Brown, 2012). For minority groups in particular, shame is a source of identity, although most of us prefer not to talk about this particular emotion given how disturbing it feels. Although shame can be positive in some cases, in others it can become very negative, “[like] a wound made from the inside by an unseen hand...” (Kaufman, 1996, p.5). The impact is very deep, and it can make us feel exposed. If left unchecked it can warp our views of ourselves and the world, but with an outlet where one is supported shame can be released.

Bonding between humans begins at infancy and this bond is reinforced over time, so the child feels his/her parent wants a relationship with them. If this connection is broken for some reason it can trigger shame. This connection must be repaired to avoid leaving the child trapped in shame. If the connection isn’t repaired or is made worse through the actions of the parent, such as using shame to control the behaviour of the child, shame can be internalized and develop into feelings of abandonment. Internalizing the belief that he/she *is* a bad boy/girl can alter how a child feels about themselves, and subsequent events that are experienced as shameful are then connected together creating a warped self-image (Brown, 2012; Kaufman, 1996). Children may begin to believe they are unlovable, which is particularly dangerous given their dependence on their parents. In fact, “feeling unlovable is a threat to survival. It’s trauma” (Brown, 2012, p. 225).

For Indigenous children this bond was violently severed when they were removed from their families, homes, and communities. Their parents were replaced with priests, nuns, and teachers who stripped the children of their language and culture, and as the children's only example of a parental figure, taught them that only western education and values have merit in the world, leaving most survivors conflicted about the old ways of their peoples at best and at worst internalizing the beliefs they were taught at school in an attempt to fit in and survive.

In addition to the trauma and shame from residential schools, there is also the shame that comes with being a part of a minority group in this country. For Indigenous peoples in Canada, there are constant reminders of our differences from the dominant society. As noted above, the media and colonialism (including the Indian Act and its definitions of who is and isn't a real Indian) in North America have created a very specific and pervasive image of Indian people, and these negative images of Indigenous culture and people are often internalized by Indigenous peoples (Lawrence, 2004). These internalized negative images make it difficult to find a positive self-identification, making Indigenous identity a shameful thing. In addition to this, the dominant culture has created a set of expectations people must conform to in order to be successful and fit in, but these expectations often conflict with Indigenous ways of knowing and being (Kaufman, 1996).

The awareness of being Indigenous, of being different, calls attention to the self as well, and there are constant reminders of these differences throughout daily life and throughout Canada's history (Kaufman, 1996). This awareness of difference can make one feel exposed and shamed, as difference and shame are linked. Identifying as Indigenous becomes fraught with conflicting feelings, and individuals may not want to identify given these negative images and beliefs from the dominant culture. Although shame begins

interpersonally, it can become internalized and then reproduced. If specific experiences of shame are particularly damaging they become linked in the individual's mind, so that even unrelated shameful events become linked together, leading to the individual avoiding situations that could be shaming as a means of self-protection. Unfortunately, this too can become internalized to "invade the self, creating identity scripts," which are connected to the original interpersonal shame experienced in youth, causing self-hatred for being a member of a minority group. Along with this self-shaming scripts are attached to being Indigenous, leading to an Indigenous identity based in shame (Kaufman, 1996, p. 275). Kaufman (1996) notes contempt is often used to deal with feelings of shame, but all this does is recreate the hierarchy of the dominant culture in an attempt to try and feel superior. Of course, contempt is not the same as pride as contempt feeds on shame by moving its source. This is not a solution to shame as it is rooted in the negative, whereas pride is seen to be rooted in the positive experiences involved in feeling good about oneself. Antone, Miller, and Myers (1986) refer to the disruption of positive self- and cultural-identity as "ethnostress." They see ethnostress as a root problem that has impacted individuals, families, communities, and nations. The psychological disruption of being the Other that occurs to so many Indigenous youth is built on over time from witnessing things like negative media stereotypes, and leads to negative self-identity and destructive behaviour. The authors believe Indigenous cultural pride must be rebuilt in order to take back our place in this world in a good way.

Lawrence (2013) found many Indigenous peoples hid their Nateness from others as a defense mechanism to help cope with racism and trauma. This often meant separating from traditions permanently in favour of following the colonizer's ways. Internalized racism, shame, and anger about the connections between violence and Indigenous heritage can cause Indigenous peoples to colonize and police one another. Children who saw negative images

associated with being Native (such as drunkenness) may end up feeling they need to downplay their Nativeness, and reconnecting with it could be associated with a belief that they too are those negative images. Often silence is encouraged in order to avoid trouble, and silence is often used to protect children from the pain their parents experience. Unfortunately, this silence results in a loss of Native identity (Lawrence, 2013).

When someone experiences trauma a portion of their brain shuts down, and their memory and thought processes become confused, leaving fragmented images and sensations stored in the unconscious. These fragments can later become triggered by reliving the trauma or experiencing another event that might only be slightly similar to the original traumatic event, leading to the impairment of the frontal lobes and making it difficult to think or speak (Wolynn, 2016). Complex trauma happens when one is exposed to several or prolonged traumatic events that often involve psychological abuse, neglect, or physical and sexual abuse (Atkinson, 2013). Given that all experiences grow our brain, trauma that is experienced in early life, such as that felt by children in residential schools or that felt by children taken by child services, can impact how the brain develops.

Over time trauma can lead to an individual's survival mechanisms to become dominant over learning mechanisms, leading the person to constantly look to avoid harm rather than to actively look for healthy growth and development. Children's sense of safety, trust, and self-worth can be damaged leading to a loss of a strong sense of self. Emotional shame, grief, distress, aggression or difficulty with relationships with caregivers, peers, and partners can also develop through the lifespan. The child's attachment style can also be disrupted, contributing to additional interpersonal issues, experience with child welfare and justice systems, health problems, and greater access to services (Atkinson, 2013). Many

survivors deal with depression, low self-worth, alienation, feeling abandoned, and powerlessness (O'Neill et al 2016).

On top of those constant reminders from the dominant society and those experienced as a result of historical colonialism, there is also the trauma that has been passed down through the generations. Secondary trauma, or intergenerational trauma, occurs when trauma and its associated wounds are transferred from the survivors of the original trauma (the first generation) to second and further generations of their descendants (Atkinson, 2013). Survivors of residential school were often unable to be as responsive to their children's needs causing attachment issues, and passed down abusive, fearful, or neglectful parenting learned from their "caregivers" at these institutions. Children were dealing with their own traumas while they grew up, struggling with the same or similar issues as their parents, creating a cycle of trauma. In fact, the traumatized children of traumatized survivors may develop language slower, be unable to self-regulate, and have learning and attention difficulties (O'Neill et al, 2016). When in life the children experienced their own traumas is also a factor, as there are critical developmental stages across the lifespan; depending on whether the traumas happened early in life, in later youth, or throughout childhood will contribute to the development and well-being of the child (O'Neill et al, 2016). Atkinson (2013) suggests that this intergenerational trauma can be passed on in the same ways culture is transmitted. Of course, not all parents who are dealing with their own traumas are bound to be neglectful, fearful, or abusive to their children. Many survivors have been very resilient, as have many children of survivors.

Historical trauma is similar to intergenerational trauma, but refers to the long-term harmful impacts of traumatic historical events experienced by a particular social group as a whole (Nascimento, 2013). For Indigenous peoples, we are dealing with our historical

traumas from colonization (including smallpox, massacres and murders, starvation, residential schools, being treated as less-than-human, having our land stolen and our children stolen) and the traumas it brought with it, as well as intergenerational trauma, and the ongoing colonialism and racism today. When everyday stressors in the present day occur, our responses interact with not only these events, but also the historical and intergenerational events (Bombay, Matheson, and Anisman, 2014).

Although Indigenous peoples are facing traumas at nearly all levels of their lives, it is important to remember that these experiences can also be a pathway to building resiliency. Learning to deal with stressors and traumas can help us reveal our true capabilities and strengths to pass along to our children (Wolynn, 2016).

Resiliency

Understanding how traumas have impacted Indigenous peoples is critical in understanding our identities. We must know our pain and work through it in order to let it go. However, it is also important to discuss how positive aspects of resiliency are also passed down through the generations, albeit in more subtle ways than prior to contact. Restoule (2008) notes how Indigenous cultural values are passed down even though the more visible aspects of culture, such as regalia making or harvesting and eating traditional foods, are not. As mentioned earlier, many Indigenous families lost their connections to their lands and families through the Indian Act and various other acts of colonialism, and many deny their own heritage to protect themselves from the ongoing acts of colonialism and racism. For these families, it was not possible to pass down certain cultural practices. However, despite this silence many families still passed down traditional Indigenous value systems and worldviews to their children. Although traditional hunting, praying, gathering, and social practices could no longer be expressed, parents still instilled values of interconnection,

relationships, and reciprocity in their children. Although this does allow the values to remain, Indigenous values differ from western values, automatically situating urban Indigenous children as the “other.” Restoule (2008) found that as these children grew up, despite their parents hiding their identity they began to seek out their families’ histories, and to reconnect with their internalized Indigenous values their parents were able to pass on to them.

Our resiliency as Indigenous peoples is an important part of the journey to healing from the wounds of colonialism.

3.2.3 Weaving the research into my story

Until doing this work, I did not realize how rigidly the Indian Act controlled Indian status. I now understand why my Grandma lost her status and why she and my mother got it back but my sister and I did not. I saw why I had turned away from my spiritual gifts to focus on the sciences, and why I felt conflicted about who I was. Until doing this work, I had never deeply questioned how or why things are the way they are. I knew things weren’t right, but I was naïve enough to have accepted terms like Aboriginal, non-status, status, and so forth, as inherently true. Discovering this acceptance to be part of the process of colonization was a revelation, yet at the same time it seemed so obvious. These definitions are divisive and political in nature, reducing peoples to nothing more than the sum of their parts (Legault, 2012). I was finally beginning to see why my own identity had felt so fraught growing up, and why I still felt so lost and confused.

Understanding the depths of how regulated Indigenous identity is by external forces, and what that can do to a peoples was also another hard jolt. I did not realize until this point that there were laws my people did not make that controlled how I could identify, which in turn helped to shape my internal opinion of myself as someone who did not belong

anywhere. Lawrence (2003) and Restoule (2000) showed me how the Indian Act created an interpretation of Indigenous identity that has become accepted as normal or natural by both the dominant society and Indigenous peoples. How many of us see ourselves as Indigenous peoples has been shaped by this Act as it told us not only who was considered an Indian, but also how one ceased being an Indian. The Indian Act lumped different Indigenous groups together while removing their ability to self-identify. It attacked Indigenous women by making identity related to gender, and created the idea of a “half-breed.” So identifying as Inuit, Métis, or Indian means accepting an imposed definition of otherness that is meant to serve the colonial government (Sawchuk, 2001).

I finally realized why it took me until I was in my mid-30s to finally get my status card. It feels ridiculous to write this out now, but at the time I assumed that there was something wrong with me because I did not qualify for status. It meant I was not a real Indian like my cousins on the reserve, so I did not belong. The fact that I lived off-reserve, was considered a “half-breed” (or mixed, or striped as I have been called), and am female was not an issue before reminded me that Canadian law hasn’t been around all that long, and my ancestors have lived on x^wməθk^wəyəm since time immemorial. The imposed definitions were internalized within me, and once I recognized that, I recognized it in many of my peoples over my lifetime. So many of us accept these colonial boundaries and divisions. It made me realize that there is still no reason for them, except to allow the colonial government to continue business as usual on stolen or misused Indigenous lands and resources. Seeing the depths of how colonial violence has impacted Indigenous identity made me realize that this disconnection I felt within myself must exist all over this country.

Understanding more about trauma and shame was critical in my own understanding of who I am. As I mentioned, I have a habit of assuming that there is something wrong with

me, but I am now able to see that this is not (entirely) the truth. Even though I have had a privileged life, I still carry the pain of my ancestors and I have learned to be ashamed of who I am from them and from my own experiences. Now that I can see it, I can begin to heal from this. There is nothing “wrong” with me, I have just been programmed to believe this as a result of colonialism. I am now able to remind myself that I deserve to exist and have a good life just as much as anyone else. I can also see how this shame caused me to turn away from my Indigeneity and seek fulfillment in the dominant society. In the end, my healing will come from accepting and embracing both parts of my heritage, while returning to the teachings my mother offered as I grew up. I must be able to be fully myself, in all situations.

3.2.4 Education

Since contact Indigenous peoples have had a very complicated relationship with education. The current education system was imposed upon Indigenous peoples initially through the residential school system, and as I discussed above the intergenerational impacts of these institutions are still being felt in Indigenous communities and individuals to this day. When the first treaties were negotiated, most of them stated that education had to be provided for the peoples in order to help them adapt to the world the colonizers were bringing with them. However, rather than provide education where the Indigenous children lived, they were removed to distant locations in order to erase their culture (Belanger, 2014). Not surprisingly, many Indigenous peoples now harbour a deep mistrust of educational institutions and indeed, of institutions in general, making the journey through education more complex for Indigenous students.

Indigenous worldviews

Before discussing the impacts of Western education on Indigenous peoples, I will offer a brief overview of Indigenous ways of knowing based on my own understandings. I

hope that by doing so I provide some understanding as to why Western education has not been serving Indigenous peoples. After then discussing Western education and connecting the above research on identity and historical situations with my understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing, I will attempt to present a window into how educators and policy makers in post-secondary institutions can begin to work towards widening their gaze and better supporting Indigenous identity, and so decolonization and healing.

It is important to begin by stating there is no single Indigenous culture, as each nation is distinct in land base and so is distinct in language, history, and cultural practices (Frideres, 2011; Armstrong (Lecture, February 24, 2017)). However, there are some commonalities across Indigenous communities that can serve as a starting point. Although I am providing an overview of common Indigenous worldviews, this is based on what I have learned through my own experience and in my research, and it is interpreted and expressed through my own x^wməθk^wəyəm mixed-heritage cultural lens. Other individuals will have different ways of framing their teachings, such as the medicine wheel and the Seven Sacred Teachings, but I am only able to present my framework.

Indigenous worldviews require dedication in order to embody them through immersing oneself in the principles and protocols. These worldviews cannot be truly understood without deep reflection of self in order to see one's true relationships with the world; it means embodying, or rather living, the ways of knowing. Incorporating Indigenous worldviews into the education system can seem tokenistic without this deeper understanding.

As noted earlier, situating self is an important part of this work. Returning to the spindle whorl framework, the centre, or spindle, represents my own x^wməθk^wəyəm worldviews. Without the spindle, the whorl would not work. I approach my work from an off-reserve x^wməθk^wəyəm mixed-ancestry worldview, which explains why I think and act the

way I do. By grounding myself in my own experiences and beliefs, it leaves room for the many truths of others rather than the idea of one universal truth (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). Indigenous peoples have their own truth which may not align with the truth of others, but allowing for us all to situate ourselves and to dialogue around these truths honours each of us.

A central theme in Indigenous worldviews is that of interconnection. I was raised to believe that all things are connected to everything else, and many other Indigenous concepts and values hinge on this concept of interconnection. This includes connection to non-humans as we are all a part of the Earth and all of her creations, and to the spiritual world including our ancestors and those who have yet to come. We are all a part of the Universe and so are sacred beings. Wilson (2008) envisions us all as points of light infinitely connected with each other. These connections are our relationships with these lights, forming a web of relationships that form our reality. “We could not be without being in relationship with everything that surrounds us and is within us” (Wilson, 2008, p. 76). Armstrong (2005) offers a Syilx perspective on interconnection, noting how it is each individual’s responsibility to realize their full potential as they are each a part of a family organism. These families are then connected to the larger network of community, and the community is connected to the land that sustains us. If we are all connected we must be mindful of what we do and say as it touches everyone and everything. Knowing everything is connected demands humans to treat each other with respect and love. It “demands our responsibility to everything we are connected to” (Armstrong, 2005, p. 13). Losing sight of this could cause harm to others and to the Earth.

Interconnection also means all things are relevant. This goes for every individual, culture, ant, fish, and breath of air. Honouring these connections demands we treat everyone

with respect, as what I do for one, I do for all. And if we are all a part of the Earth and the Universe, then we all deserve to be treated as the sacred beings we are, and our students deserve to be taught that they deserve this as well. In the x^wməθk^wəyəm language hənqəminəm, the word nác'amət ct loosely translates to “we are all one.” As my Uncle Shane said, in order to do good research, the researcher must become a *whole* person. That is, they must reconnect to their minds, bodies, hearts, and especially spirits in order to do the best work possible. I think this applies to not only research, but to life. In order to spin wool properly, the spindle must balance the whorl properly. For those of us working in education, we too must balance ourselves, or we will not work properly. Each of us must become a whole person in life. Operating from this mind frame, we are required to not only go to our centre and find our best selves, but we then must live our lives and embody the principle of interconnection. We must behave based on the understanding we are infinitely bound with all things, and what we do touches the Earth in ways we may not understand. We cannot know what pulling on a thread of connection will do to other connections, much like how the vibrations on a strand of spider web are felt throughout the web.

As I mentioned earlier, gathering wool was a community process. The process was slow, but it brought many voices together, strengthened ties to each other, while educating the younger generation. Given our interconnections, relationships are critical as they are how we learn about the world. Knowledge itself cannot really belong to anyone, and so we cannot really ever “know” something. Knowledge belongs to the Universe just as the Earth and every creature on it does. All we can do as humans is interpret what we see and experience through our relationships with one another in building our reality (Wilson, 2008). As the whorl spins, knowledge is formed through a blending of views and stories, rather than an absolute truth. The spindle and whorl must work together to bring together all the many

strands and create something that is both beautiful and useful. Building relationships is more than making “small talk,” it is about engaging with people in an authentic way. It means speaking your truth and giving space for others to speak their own truths, as what we do shapes our reality and our knowledge. It requires deep listening with one’s mind, heart, spirit, and body in order to honour the connection that is already there between us. In order for it to be effective it requires trust between the parties, requiring each person to bring their whole selves to the relationship in order to build trust through a constant give and take (Archibald, 2008). Meaningful relationships are also long-lasting; they must be built over time, nurtured, and there is an expectation that should one of the parties require support in the future the other party will be willing to help. There is a sense of responsibility in all of this, especially as many experiences in our lives have taught us to be disconnected from each other and even ourselves. Relationships ask us to accept that responsibility whole heartedly, and think and act accordingly. It is through our relationships that we learn more about ourselves as well, demanding us to become better, more connected people.

As the culmination of the work, the spun wool can be woven into a blanket. This again highlights connection, as the individual threads are spun together and then woven from one end to the other. Everything is connected within the weaving, and without these connections it would not be a blanket. Every imperfection becomes a part of the weaving, making it unique. The technique and skill are visible, and the blanket can be used for warmth and ceremony. The work is not about benefitting one person; it is about making something that will benefit others through the entire process. The process of gathering the wool strengthens ties and builds relationships, spinning encourages balance and patience, as does weaving, and blankets can be given away to others, strengthening relationship ties between communities. Reciprocity is woven throughout these previous concepts as it is the behaviour

(i.e. action) that maintains relationships, balance, and holism. Giving back is why you do what you do, otherwise what is the point? Reciprocity is the relationship between a giver and receiver that maintains the flow and balance of energy and allows for benefits of the relationship to be distributed equally (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). It is unhealthy to try and hoard benefits to oneself, and eventually this energy imbalance will realign itself in ways we cannot predict. Establishing this give and take can mean many things, depending on the situation. It would be important to determine what it means for each person involved in the relationship, which means time and effort is required. Reciprocity should work towards building each other up in a way that is positive and empowering, so that all benefit. In a strong community the minority and the majority both have respected rights, and the needs of everyone (and hopefully the needs of other species, given our interconnections) are considered before decisions are made (Armstrong, 2005).

Of course this is only a brief summary of my understanding of Indigenous worldview, but hopefully it provides some basic understanding to move forward. Western worldviews tend to clash with Indigenous ones. Historically this has been (to say the least) very damaging to Indigenous peoples as western worldviews favour ultimate truths and the idea that others with differing worldviews must fall in line with western ones, or perish. This behaviour is seen in institutions, such as post-secondary education, where western worldviews form the foundation for all operations. Coming to a post-secondary institution with a different worldview and value set can then create a very challenging environment for Indigenous students to navigate.

Western education and Indigenous peoples

Many of the problems the education system faces have to do with the foundation of Western ways of knowing it is built upon. According to Frideres (2011) Western ways of

knowing were born out of ancient beliefs from Greece and Egypt and moved through Europe during the Renaissance. The belief that man could control nature as he was above it took hold, and removed any spirituality or emotion from knowledge production in favour of one way of looking at the world: the scientific one. Science is seen as a universal truth embracing concepts like dualism (right/wrong, on/off, black/white, etc.), the importance of objectivity, empirical data, realism, linear time, and as noted, the dominance of man over nature.

“Western ways of knowing are embodied in the equation: Knowledge = justified, true belief” (Frideres, 2011, p.45-46). These ways of knowing bled into other areas and led to worldviews embraced by the patriarchy and so colonialism. Teachers learned there was one way to think and be, and this was the norm (hooks, 1994). The desire to control, the belief in universal truths, and the fear of losing these things drove the Western world to place itself at the top of the hierarchy they created, relegating all other peoples beneath them. Colonialism is itself intertwined with these worldviews, and the colonizers brought these ideas with them and sought to eliminate or assimilate all others who saw the world differently.

The education system that is in place today was designed by the colonizers for the colonizers. That is, white, heterosexual, European men. All other groups such as women, people with different sexual orientations, people with disabilities, or non-European backgrounds had to conform in order to succeed in the system, and so the world the system had created. As I mentioned earlier, Battiste (2000) identifies this as cognitive imperialism or cultural racism, where the dominant society imposes its worldviews on others and sets these worldviews as the only acceptable way of thinking and looking at the world. This is not an issue of the past though, as post-secondary institutions continue to colonize Indigenous students and look down, sometimes unconsciously, on Indigenous world views and knowledge systems (Regan, 2010). Cote-Meek (2010) adds that the practices that happen in

the classroom are also rooted in historical racism, which is embedded into all of our institutions and keeps one racial group in power over all others. This hidden curriculum of economic and cultural reproduction privileges knowledge based in white, male, heterosexual, European worldviews over all others, effectively reproducing the colonial system over and over again (Battiste, 2000; Egbo, 2009; Haraway, 1989). Children learn the only way to be accepted and successful is to conform to these worldviews, and this is reinforced in the media, social norms, and in the workplace. The education system is then not only a colonial institution, but it also is a colonizing one. That is, the Canadian education system is continuing to shape children (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) in order to get them to conform to this one, narrow worldview of the dominant society (Battiste, 2000).

Battiste (2000) notes this education system discredits other forms of knowledge such as that from the ancestors, dreams, and spirits in order to maintain the status quo in society. So each Indigenous child is learning their values and views do not matter, nor do they have a place in western society as it is painted as the only society with any worth. The western education system does not align with Indigenous values (Willett, 2007; Restoule, 2005), and the curriculum does not promote Indigenous worldviews and so does not empower Indigenous identity. Battiste and Henderson (2000, p. 36) note how colonizers work to “Europeanize all knowledge and heritage” for their own purposes through definitions, constructed categories, and absolute truths; Indigenous knowledge and values are no exception.

Post-secondary institutions in Canada, as they are built on colonial concepts of education and research, have traditionally been institutions of colonization. Psychology, history, political science, biology, chemistry, and of course, anthropology, are all fields built on western values and ways of knowing. However, the idea that we can observe the world

objectively and parse it into categories restricts our understanding of phenomena, and acts as a breeding ground for racism (Deloria Jr., 2004). Deloria Jr. asserts that the belief in the inferiority of Indians in the academy is clear as it is engrained in every college and university's degree programs. Professors who have no idea about Indigenous history and truth may still be teaching about the savage Indians and innocent settlers, and only accepting papers with Eurocentric theories. Anthropology and related fields (even First Nations studies courses) often see white professors teaching Indigenous history, or operating under the belief that they are the ultimate authority on Indigenous peoples (Mihesuah, 2004). In fact, post-secondary institutions are no different than other colonial institutions as they are microcosms of the larger dominant, colonial society and its structures, making them unsafe places to be for Indigenous peoples (Alfred, 2004). Universities are part of the larger system as a whole, and serve objectives like globalization and modernity. There are non-Indigenous scholars and staff members who still oppress and colonize Indigenous peoples without knowing they are doing it, and privilege western knowledge systems over Indigenous ones. They often still appropriate, ignore, exploit, harm, and revictimize Indigenous peoples without knowing it, or worse without seeing why this is an issue.

The goals of these institutions often clash with Indigenous peoples' goals as our values are often so different. The ideals of linear thinking, individualism, dominance and power, money, maintaining an image, reason, and following the rules tend to clash with Indigenous values of interconnections, relationships, and the land (James, 2004; Alfred, 2004). Universities have historically served the cultural interests of the colonizers, becoming the centre of privilege in the western world, unable to accept other perspectives (Heath Justice, 2004; Willett, 2007). Research generally has a Eurocentric bias, and is based on cognitive imperialism and universality (Battiste & Henderson, 2000 Ethical issues in

research). Many Indigenous students and their communities are uneasy about research, given how damaging it has been. Most researchers do not understand community priorities, preferring to rely on western methods of categorization and dehumanization (NAHO, 2005; Smith, 1999). The bureaucratic structure of these institutions compartmentalizes services, allowing other areas of the academy to ignore issues like rates of Native student drop-outs, and acts as a divide and conquer technique “to keep people who are being treated badly from banding together, as well as to give them a target for anger other than the administration” (James, 2004, p. 61). As Alfred (2004) notes, colonialism is more than just a point in time or a theory, it is a total way of existing in the world, and causes us to see things in terms of domination and submission as a foundation for our lives. The truths about our shared past are ignored or denied. Post-secondary institutions and their staff, faculty, and students, are no exception to this way of being in the world. The lens of domination/submission, and denying our history has created a culture of fear, based on a history of hatred and violence. To get past the guilt and shame of our past we lie, hide from our past, and are afraid of ourselves and each other as a result. This fear is also foundational in colonial institutions, but the lie must be maintained in order to normalize our present, and to explain why things are the way they are in a way most of us can accept (Alfred, 2004). In order to move past this, the root of western ways of thinking must be examined and repaired.

Students do not feel represented or supported by the current system as it seems the journey through education works to erase Indigenous identity rather than working to heal from past traumas and support identity. Things are beginning to change in some areas, as there is movement to make curriculums more open to other perspectives, and some professors and staff can now take courses in cultural safety in order to work more effectively in our multicultural world. But this mustn't be the end as the racism and privilege embedded

in education must be fully acknowledged and dealt with, otherwise it allows colonization to continue (Cote-Meek, 2010). The western ways of knowing outlined above such as universality and dualism are taught as unquestionable truths, leaving little to no room for other ways of knowing. The denial of other truths teaches Indigenous students they are different; the “other.” The experience of being different from the dominant society, seeing negative media portrayals of one’s people, and the pressure to conform in school can lead to deep shame from racism and negative self-images becoming internalized (Delpit 2006; Kaufman 1996). It also confirms for white people their dominance over others as the norm, making the power dynamics invisible in our every day lives. Racism becomes something that is an individual problem or fault, rather than embedded in society. This does not create a welcoming or safe environment for Indigenous students in schools. Not surprisingly, Indigenous children often see a decline in school performance as they learn from teachers and other authority figures their ways of viewing the world are incorrect (Abotossaway, 2005). Teaching Indigenous peoples they are “wrong” for their thoughts and beliefs is shaming, and acts as another reminder of how different and inferior they are to the dominant culture. This shame is extremely damaging to self-image and identity formation, yet it is reinforced throughout the education system, including post-secondary, making success in a program of choice extremely difficult. This is of particular importance as most Indigenous students are dealing with complex, intergenerational trauma as well as dealing with school experiences. As Egbo (2009) notes, this must change as it robs the larger society of valuable cultural capital and the chance to build a stronger, more accepting world, making it an issue that must be addressed by everyone. Indigenous students need to be celebrated and recognized as the brilliant individuals they are (Delpit, 2006), and to learn to see and celebrate the self.

Indigenous peoples who see life as a whole are required to disconnect from this way while at school, which can be both emotionally and psychologically damaging (Alfred, 2004). This cognitive dissonance is a large reason why Indigenous students leave the institution. While at post-secondary Indigenous students must find a way to reconcile their own worldviews with those of the institution by accepting the Western worldview or finding a way to operate in it (Willett, 2007). Unfortunately, this typically means suppressing traditional value systems as professors often don't understand things like the need to be with family, ceremony, cleansing, or the importance of correct tribal names and the land (Abotossaway, 2005; Mihesuah, 2004). Often the reasons students cite for their dislike of university has to do with ideological suppression (Mihesuah, 2004). Some Indigenous students are also learning another language, as well as learning about western culture (Fuzessy, 1997). From my own experience of working in student services, Indigenous students are often coping with culture shock from moving from smaller, more remote communities, as well as shame, complex and intergenerational trauma, depression, and fear.

In the classroom Indigenous students are often expected to answer for all Indigenous peoples, treating them as the expert on all Natives and Native issues. This is accompanied by an expectation to speak up and about all Native topics in the moment, while also being expected to let go of the past and assimilate. This of course ignores the fact that many Indigenous peoples, even those who are more visible than others, are dealing with identity issues and may not be connected to their community and culture, or they struggle with depression, self-confidence issues, internalized oppression, and/or feel inferior to white students (Mihesuah, 2004). Paradoxically, Indigenous students are also asked to play the role of a cultural or spiritual advisor in the classroom, and if they do not perform adequately they are not seen as being a real Indian (Cote-Meek, 2010), despite not having been allowed to

have this knowledge before. It is a constant navigation that can be emotionally and physically draining, much like ethnostress. Typically, there are no Indigenous counsellors on-campus, and cultural resources are spread thin if they exist at all, so accessing support in dealing with these issues is difficult.

Indigenous students must navigate situations where they are marginalized and oppressed, and they must deal with what Brayboy (2004) referred to as “surveillance.” Indigenous students are watched by other students, staff, and faculty in a way that causes the Indigenous students’ actions and even identity to change. I would add it is not only being observed by others, it is also being judged and policed by others as well that makes student life difficult. Students may cut their hair to seem more white, avoid debates with others, or withdraw to isolation in order to avoid surveillance from other students and those in power. Although the institution prefers this invisibility for the most part, these actions are also under surveillance and can lead to Indigenous students being labelled as intimidating or antisocial. Students who choose to remain visible must cope with the additional surveillance that comes with that behaviour, although there are some types of visibility that cannot be controlled due to physical appearance, and stereotypes around the Indian abound. How an Indigenous person is perceived by a non-Indigenous person is a construction that is dependent on their own presentation of themselves, how they feel about themselves in that moment, who is seeing them, and the context they are in together. Cote-Meek (2010, p.199) notes how the “insidious nature of these constructions puts Aboriginal students in the precarious position of negotiating their own identity. At either ends of these spectrums they are caught in a web that holds in place white supremacy.”

As mentioned earlier Indigenous peoples, including Indigenous students, are dealing with intergenerational trauma and the issues that come along with that such as addictions and

depression, racism in their day-to-day lives, internalized racism and colonization, identity issues, and so forth. These things do not disappear while coming to university or college as these institutions are not neutral places, but are places “where racial conflict is played out” (Cote-Meek, 2010, p. 204). As these institutions are microcosms of the larger, dominant society, Indigenous students must deal with all of these issues, on top of the above issues that comes from attending a colonizing institution. While in the classroom they must listen to misrepresentations and stereotypes of their peoples, or racist opinions based on lies about our shared history.

Indigenous knowledge is widely undermined by faculty and students according to Indigenous students at UBCO, and safe spaces are almost non-existent with the exception of the Aboriginal Centre and Aboriginal Programs and Services. On-campus Indigenous culture is almost non-existent, with Indigenous students at UBCO feeling isolated and invisible (Cajax, Chau, Lee, & Parkins, 2018). The burden often lies with the student to find support based on Indigenous values, relationships, and healing through this journey, with access to traditions becoming much more difficult “in the university’s individualistic and highly competitive environment” (Cajax, Chau, Lee, & Parkins, 2018, p. 6). While working at APS I watched students use UBCO as a place to explore their identity while getting their education, and saw them graduate as a stronger person, more connected to themselves and their community. However, I had also seen some leave after one term, or even a few years, tired of navigating the conflicts between their education and their personal life. Or because of financial issues, racist encounters with faculty or students, mental health problems, issues with addictions, family upheaval such as a death or separation, or feeling lost and without a place in a confusing culture. UBCO has done a lot of great work, but more is needed to make it an institution for all Indigenous students, faculty, and staff to thrive at.

Although there has been increased attention paid to the trauma and intergenerational trauma Indigenous peoples experience(d) over the years, finding ways to reduce the trauma we experience in day-to-day life needs to happen as well. If we are shamed, stigmatized, stereotyped, and judged throughout our lives and are also dealing with the echoes of the traumas our parents and grandparents felt in our bodies, hearts, and spirits then coming to post-secondary can be an overwhelming experience. We still deal with these traumas on-campus, in our classrooms and dorm rooms, while we try to get a western education. Post-secondary institutions are colonial institutions built on colonial foundations, so every building, office, policy, professor, and many of the staff reflect this foundation. Post-secondary institutions must find a way to reduce the trauma and shame that Indigenous peoples face every day on-campus. If we are the start of change because of our status as an institution of higher learning, then let us lead the way.

3.2.5 What can post-secondary institutions do differently?

Post-secondary can be a place for Indigenous students to have a new relationship with education that actively helps with restoring their Indigenous identity while also offering a university education. As Barnes (2002 & 2010) learned, university can be a place for Indigenous students to allow their identity to emerge if it has been dormant, and those who already have strong identities can refine their understandings. Some students come to post-secondary as part of their efforts to learn more about their history and identity. Residential schools, child welfare practices, and colonialism in general has caused the disconnects that made these searches necessary. Indigenous students often learn there is nothing wrong with them or their family, but that racism, colonialism, and oppression has become internalized and has dehumanized Indigenous peoples, leading to their family and community situations (hooks, 1995; Cote-Meek, 2010). When identity is affirmed, Indigenous students' self-esteem

is positively effected, making it more likely for them to succeed in their studies (Bruce, 2003). However, in order for this to happen, as is illustrated above there are a number of things that need to change in post-secondary for this to be possible for all Indigenous students. In the past the burden has been on Indigenous peoples to “fit in” to the dominant society; however, given our history it is not only unfair to continue making Indigenous peoples do this work, it is unrealistic as it involves only one group of peoples that are involved in a complex relationship. The dominant society is already a violent place for Indigenous peoples, but if post-secondary institutions can become places where Indigenous students are supported in order to heal from the violence of colonialism it would not only benefit these students, but others as well. This can only be done by examining post-secondary institutions as the colonial creations they are, in order to work towards a complete paradigm shift. Although Aboriginal centres with Aboriginal staff and faculty on-campus are excellent beginnings that many institutions now have, they are not enough. Given that all things are connected and interrelated, Indigenous identity cannot thrive without decolonization and Indigenization. We cannot heal the wounds of the past and create a holistic future where Indigenous students thrive without the dominant society who run these institutions exploring their own biases, paternalism, and colonial ways of being and interacting with Indigenous peoples and each other. If they do not, the same colonial policies and practices will continue to be implemented despite the best intentions around “reconciliation.”

If students can stay strong in their identity as well as operate within institutional expectations their experience in post-secondary will be much more positive as they can move between both cultures easier (Fuzessy, 1997). Willett (2007) points out that this means Indigenous students are doing twice the amount of work compared to non-Indigenous students as they are not only learning the course material, but they are also attempting to

reconcile two opposing worldviews. If students are unable to balance these worldviews Indigenous students will less likely to be successful in their course work. Indigenous students must reconcile the fact that their own worldviews are likely much different than the ones being taught in their classes of psychology, political science, and calculus (Willett, 2007). Abotossaway (2005), Fuzessy (1997), and Willett (2007) agree that if Indigenous post-secondary students are able to stay strong in their own ways while also either accepting the dominant view points or learning to converse in them, they will be more likely to do well both socially and academically. Indeed, Mihesuah (2004, p. 194) notes Indigenous “students with confidence, a strong belief in the importance of their cultures, strong study skills, parental support, a desire to succeed, and plans to work within their communities and reservations are more likely to complete their degrees.” However, it is also important the institution recognize Indigenous values as valid and important, and adapt expectations to reflect this in order for Indigenous students to stop feeling they must choose between their own world and the dominant one (Abotossaway, 2005; Fuzessy, 1997). Educational institutions need to support Indigenous value systems and ways of learning so students do not have to do all of this extra emotional and spiritual work to succeed (Abotossaway 2005; Fuzessy 1997; Willett 2007). Having Indigenous faculty, courses, and spaces are vital to keeping Indigenous students connected with their learning and identity in a safe and supportive environment (Restoule, 2005). This must also extend to other settings such as meeting with professors, living in dormitories, or even walking across campus. Safe spaces cannot be small pockets on campus, but rather all throughout it. Given this, non-Indigenous allies are an important safe space as well (Younging, 2019, personal communication). All of these things are required in order for post-secondary to be a place for Indigenous students to

explore and strengthen their identity through healing, decolonizing, and empowering experiences.

Creating an institution that fosters decolonization and Indigenization requires remaking colonial views on how humans are classified, and examining power dynamics (Sium, Desai, & Ritskes, 2012). Generally, settlers do not see the violence that is part of every day life for Indigenous peoples such as racism, cultural domination, and poverty that are all a result of our shared history and colonial present, but understanding this on an intellectual and an emotional level is critical in order to move beyond it (Regan, 2010). If administration, staff, and faculty can work towards understanding our colonial history and our colonial present, the structures our institutions are built on cannot be seen in the same way. Once we are aware our institutions are built on foundations that do not serve most people we can no longer claim ignorance, and we have to take responsibility for our actions.

However, getting to this understanding is often difficult and uncomfortable as it means confronting our privilege and seeing how it has benefitted us, and questioning why that is. Learning about our shared history of genocide, racism, and our colonial present challenges the myth that we are peacemakers in this country, and confronts settlers with the fact that they have benefitted from these crimes. As Regan (2010) acknowledges, settler denial and guilt can get in the way, leading to talking and theorizing about the issues in order to distance themselves from these feelings and responsibility rather than taking conscious action. Often people will get stuck as we have a tendency to resist the difficult emotions that come with critical reflection and reflexivity. Until settler denial is addressed we cannot hope to make meaningful changes in post-secondary policies and practices. When students, staff, and faculty on-campus minimize or deny Indigenous students' experiences with racism and colonial violence it often has a negative effect on Indigenous students' education and can be

a reason for leaving post-secondary altogether (Cote-Meek, 2010). Regan (2010) further notes how settlers must examine their definitions of violence in order to recognize and stop the subtle violence that is embedded in Indigenous-settler relations in everyday life. Cote-Meek (2010) sees colonial violence as physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and sexual and is transmitted through the generations. In many ways it has permeated our society in such a way that it has become normalized and seen as an individual issue rather than a collective one. This just gives us permission to avoid addressing these various levels of violence in public spaces such as schools.

Neu and Therrien (2003) argue that the government's use of strategic planning, law, and accounting to manipulate program funding mechanisms, which is a form of violence and a slow form of genocide directed at Indigenous peoples. The colonial foundation for our laws and policies (which are so dear to us for maintaining order and control over life) set the template for other western governments and institutions that were established in Canada. Since most of our institutions and most certainly all of Canada's various levels of bureaucracies are all operating with a western, colonial worldview it seems reasonable to expand on Neu and Therrien's point and suggest that this manipulation extends to other policies and programs such as those in post-secondary institutions. Re-examining our definitions of violence by learning our history and present reveals the bias and Eurocentrism embedded within our societal structures. This bias and Eurocentrism demands that the Other abandon their ways of knowing and conform. Teaching Indigenous students that the only way to be successful in education is to conform to the "norm" on-campus is extremely damaging to Indigenous peoples if they do not have the tools to resist this colonization.

Given what I noted earlier on the impacts trauma can have on the brain and one's ability to learn and trust, and a lifetime of having dealt with microaggressions, and post-

secondary institutions colonial nature, the journey to post-secondary graduation can be a very difficult and emotionally draining one. Indigenous students are also expected to leave their trauma or 'emotional baggage' at home, as if it was not a part of everyday life (Cote-Meek, 2010). All of this can challenge mental health and continues to confirm to students that Indigenous peoples are not welcome or deemed important. Post-secondary institutions must become safe institutions so students who are dealing with all of this trauma can learn and be healthy and confident in their identity. They shouldn't have to fight every day to maintain who they are, or to deal with the anxiety and grief of giving in to colonial ways while trying to work towards a degree. Each day many of us navigate a veritable mine field of microaggressions, racism, silencing, and well-meaning but exclusionary policies on a campus that (in the case of my own campus) is built on unceded, traditional, and ancestral Syilx territory while being asked to conform to a western value system in order to succeed. For some students this is too much of a challenge given their personal histories and they may drop out of school. For others the colonization may turn into internal colonization, allowing shame and negative self-images to continue. Ongoing racism and colonization leads to Indigenous peoples being silenced as they learn to shut down in order to self-protect (Cote-Meek, 2010). This silencing, internal colonization and shame, as noted above, is passed on to their children. This is the slow genocide Neu and Therrien refer to, and it must change.

In order to do so in a meaningful way, everyone involved in the daily operations of post-secondary institutions must carefully and critically examine the cultural attitudes that are influencing their behaviour and attitudes towards Indigenous peoples. The ongoing colonial relationship that post-secondary institutions (and so the individuals working for them) have with Indigenous peoples defines the interactions between the peoples, inevitably leading to the same mistakes being made repeatedly. By not looking at the truths in our underlying

belief structures and dealing with the uncomfortable knowledge that we have been participating in a system designed to suppress a particular group of people we are allowing it to continue. We cannot claim to have no knowledge of this, as most of us knew enough in order to avoid paying attention to it or learning more (Regan, 2010).

Examining the true nature of the Indigenous-settler relationship can be very uncomfortable and even feel confrontational as it threatens not only one's worldview, value system, and image of one's country, but it also calls into question our own personal behaviours and attitudes in our day-to-day lives (Regan, 2010). Indigenous peoples and allies who resist ongoing colonialism are often seen as aggressive or militant in an excuse to ignore the issues and dismiss Indigenous peoples as mentally unstable (Cote-Meek, 2010). Many settlers believe they behave much better than their ancestors and cannot be held responsible for the actions that happened in the past. This allows them to comfort themselves, remove responsibility, and continue to ignore Indigenous reality (Regan, 2010). If we truly behaved better than our ancestors, statistics that put Indigenous health and education at the bottom would not be the norm. Therefore, it is critical that we learn to be open to feeling these uncomfortable feelings and working through them in order to acknowledge our role in it all. This guilt and denial we experience when we hear stories of Indigenous reality keeps us frozen and unable to act, and it can lead to frustration and misdirected anger. Safe spaces where individuals can share their feelings while looking at and discussing the ugly side of our history will allow people to move through the discomfort as a group (Regan, 2010). Moving through this discomfort is critical, as the stories of our Indigenous students, staff, and faculty need to be heard by the institution in order to move towards healing (Cote-Meek, 2010). It is also important to remember that this is not an attack on who colonists are as people (i.e. blaming the white man for all problems), but a call to look at the true nature of ongoing

colonialism and to see how it dictates our actions and thought processes each day. The actions that students, staff, and faculty make each day must be viewed within the larger context of historical and ongoing colonization to see our individual roles in maintaining the status quo. These actions impact Indigenous peoples on campus each day. However, this does not mean to listen to the stories passively as if they are a news story, but as Archibald (2008) says, to listen actively with the head and heart as someone in a relationship with the storytellers, and to take responsibility for discovering the meaning in the story.

Once post-secondary institution administrators, staff, and faculty have looked at these truths and moved through any potential guilt or shame, it cannot stop there. Self-reflection and empathy towards Indigenous peoples because of the history we have shared is not enough to change things; each individual must take responsibility for their role in this ongoing history of colonization and make efforts every day to interrupt that behaviour whether it is in themselves or in others. They must actively choose to do differently, and to look at each choice they make in their daily lives (at work or otherwise, ideally) and question whether it is maintaining the status quo or resisting ongoing colonialism for the benefit of *all*. It means recognizing how ongoing colonial violence has oppressed and marginalized Indigenous peoples and questioning how these systems of domination play out in the classroom relationships (e.g. labelling as “at-risk”) and curricula (Cote-Meek, 2010), as well as interpersonal interactions, funding choices, policy writing, research decisions, and programming.

It is not Indigenous peoples’ responsibility to help settlers in the institution to work through this and deal with their feelings. Each of us is responsible for finding our own path on this journey, and no one else can do it for us. We must avoid replicating past colonial violence and oppression that has demanded Indigenous peoples labour and sacrifice in order

to make life easier for the settlers. Although we can support one another, it is important non-Indigenous peoples take the initiative, do their own readings, and find their own paths through decolonization.

However, Indigenous worldviews, values, and ways of being/doing can help guide non-Indigenous peoples through the work. My mother used to say we (Indigenous peoples) are here for a reason, to teach others how to live with the Earth and each other in a good way. As mentioned above, Indigenous worldviews sees the world as interconnected, whereas the western worldview tends to compartmentalize everything. This has led to the idea that Canada's history of violence, residential schools, the current education system, intergenerational trauma, and genocide are all separate issues to be dealt with separately. This allows responsibility for reconciliation, decolonization, and Indigenization to be deflected (Regan, 2010; James, 2004). But viewing these issues as interconnected, allows us to see the whole picture and encourages us to take responsibility and ownership for our roles in this process. I recognize incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing in a good way will be fraught with pitfalls, and we will make mistakes. Instead of letting the fear of dissuade us from taking on this challenge, I hope we take the brave step and let go of our fears in order to make this paradigm shift. We must all be gentle to one another and ourselves, and as hooks (1996) notes, we must make room for each other to voice our fears and to move through them together in a supportive way.

If we seek to ethically implement Indigenous ways of knowing, we must honour the protocols of the nation on whose land we are on. Historically Indigenous ways of knowing have been appropriated by Western society in order to benefit from them, generally giving nothing back to the peoples it was taken from (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). Often this appropriation gives rise to the essence of these ways of knowing being stripped away and

tokenized by non-Indigenous peoples into something more comfortable and familiar to them, missing the point of this endeavour entirely (hooks, 1996). Indigenous peoples are now vigilant in their efforts to ensure this process ends as it is continuing the colonization process. This means we must work together to ensure Indigenous peoples feel they are being treated ethically when seeking to incorporate their ways of knowing into the system and to institutions.

Chapter Four: Weaving the Stories

Gathering the data from the research and my course work was eye-opening and ultimately helped build and strengthen the foundation of my study; the stories of the students allowed me to connect the theoretical and the internal with the external and real, lived experiences. I have had the great fortune of working in a time when Indigenous researchers have already created spaces in post-secondary institutions, allowing me to read about methodologies and research that align with my own beliefs. However, talking with the students showed me the depth of our interconnectedness with one another through our histories, and let me understand the work in a more grounded way. It is my hope that by sharing the stories of the four students in a way that does not demand categorization and quantification it will allow others to connect with the teachings in a similar way.

As was mentioned in chapter two, I also want to avoid replicating colonial research practices. I wanted to make sure the stories are not viewed as disconnected from the student and the student's experiences by keeping as much of the context as possible. It is not my place to break their stories up into pieces in order to benefit my own work, as it would not only be unethical based on an Indigenous worldview, it would also be another act of colonization.

Here I present the stories of Damyn, Violet, Sarah, and Hailey in a way that is meant to preserve their stories and contexts in a more complete way so the reader may form their own relationship and understanding of them. I have also shared my own understanding, based on how I see their words relating with my own history and relationship with the academic literature in order to offer the reader another layer to consider, and to situate myself and my knowledge. The reader may also do this, as Legault (2016, p. 155) notes, based on their

understanding of the preceding chapters and weaving it together with their relationship and understanding of the “extended accounts of the interviews” I provide in the following pages “to allow for the reader to have an interpretive experience.”

I also see threads that run throughout all five of our stories, connecting us together in ways I was not previously aware of. Offering these extended stories allows the reader to explore these threads as well, and to also see how varied the Indigenous experience is at the same time. Our experiences are unquestionably Indigenous, and are shaped by where we grew up, our family and its history, our family’s relationship with colonization, and our own individual natures.

I have grouped the stories based on the questions that guided the interviews as well as some general themes that emerged: early perceptions of Indigenous identity, changing perceptions of identity, defining Indigenous identity, Indigenous identity in elementary and high school, Indigenous identity in post-secondary, what is helping, and what needs to change. However, we often wound throughout these themes during the course of our conversation, often circling back to a theme several minutes later. With this in mind, the following is not presented in a linear fashion, which I am aware alters the stories from their initial context. However, storytelling requires the listener to interpret the story for themselves in order to gain the lessons contained within the words. Grouping the stories in this way reveals my own thinking patterns as I worked to understand and weave together the knowledge all four students shared with me.

I ask as you read the following pages to please keep the above in mind, and to try and learn who the student is by engaging with their stories as an active reader. Try to see the student as a whole person, each making sense of their own histories while building their futures.

4.1 Introductions.

Damyn

Damyn was the first student I interviewed, and I was thrilled he chose to participate with me. I first met him via email while I was working with APS when he was considering coming to UBCO. I remember meeting him in-person during our Aboriginal Orientation, and I overheard him telling another student how he had “been looking for this.” It stuck with me, because I remember feeling similar when I began to feel the community that comes with APS. Something about his tone made me curious about his history, how he came to learn about his identity, and why the Aboriginal Centre already seemed to make him smile.

I found him to be funny, quick-witted, kind, and a careful listener. When he first started his program at UBCO he seemed unsure of himself, but he grew and changed rapidly. After leaving APS I would stop in occasionally and would see him in the Centre – he was noticeably more confident and comfortable. During the interview he had changed even more, but it was like he was more fully himself.

As he was my first interview, I was quite nervous and did not ask him to introduce himself as I had planned. We had already been chatting before we started the interview, so it felt natural to just start in with the questions. I now regret that as it did not give him the opportunity to introduce himself. I reached out to see if he wanted to submit an introduction, but he was satisfied with what I had written here.

Violet

“My name’s Violet. I’m from northern Saskatchewan, and I’m a First Nations person who is Cree with my mother’s roots, and with my dad’s roots I’m Ojibway Cree, and with my step dad who raised me I am Métis Cree... I’m from North Spirit Lake First Nation, and I’m also from Lac La Ronge Indian Band, and Lac Seul First Nation...it’s from my dad’s side. (laughs) Yeah, I’m from a few different bands, but I haven’t spent too much time at Lac Seul.”

At the time of the interview, she was in her first year of the Bachelors of Science in Nursing program, but in her third year of studies at UBCO as she chose to switch her focus from becoming a doctor to becoming a nurse.

Violet was the second student I interviewed. I also met her via email when she was applying to UBCO, and again when she began attending during my last six months with APS. When I first met her I liked her instantly, and seeing how much she had grown since she started made me so happy. Her kindness, infectious smile, leadership skills, and warm energy still shone through. She brought a good energy and voice to this research, and I am grateful for everything that she chose to share with me.

Sarah

“My name is Sarah Martin. I come from Saskatchewan. My family is still mostly there. I moved to British Columbia about eight years ago, and I completed my undergrad at UBCO, and I’m doing a master’s there now. Very part-time, education program. I have a Métis status through Métis Nation BC...”

I do not remember the first time I met Sarah at APS as she was a face that was often in the Centre in various capacities while I was working there. Her strength, kindness, and determination always come through in what she is doing, and she always seems to have a gentle and understanding perspective for any situation. Being able to see her during her undergraduate degree program, and then again as she moves through her graduate program has been a gift as I was able to see how she has grown and continues to shine.

Hailey

“My name is Hailey Causton. My Okanagan name is staqwalqs, which translates to glittery, shimmery, patchwork dress. I am half Okanagan through my dad, and half...blend of Italian, English, Irish...(chuckles) mix. (laughs) I live in Westbank, and that’s where my dad is from. The place where I grew up.”

Hailey and I have known each other the longest as I first met her about 11 years ago when she was in high school. I was an Aboriginal Advocate with the school district, and I

had been working at her school periodically towards the end of her grade 11 year, and full-time during her grade 12 year. When I came to APS I was delighted to see her attending and continuing her educational journey, but I was even happier to see how she had changed and learned as a person. When I was able to interview her she had two young children, and had changed in a way only being a mother can change you. While at the talking circle she had noticeably changed again as she had started a new job in her community. Her voice has often popped into my head since our interview and talking circle, and her passion, strength, and love will undoubtedly bring good energy to whatever she chooses to do.

4.2 Sharing the stories

4.2.1 Early perceptions of Indigenous identity – how we felt about our Indigenous identity as a youth

Damyn

S: So, would you say that you have a strong Indigenous identity?

D: For sure. A hundred percent.

S: Would you have always said that?

D: Definitely not! (laughs) At one point, yeah, I would say that it was pretty negative to identify with being Indigenous in my perspective, but, now that I see...now that I understand more I think it's a lot more clear in my head, and so identifying with it just makes sense to me, 'cause that's who I am.

(I asked if he was able to express his Indigeneity growing up in Abbotsford.)

D: I think there were opportunities to, but I just didn't know how to *show* it. You know, I had all these cultural outings, and stuff like that, but again, I didn't get the full picture. So I think there was ways I could participate, but maybe not fully.

(I asked what it was like in school growing up as an urban Indigenous person.)

D: Uh, it was interesting. 'Cause, through being in the Aboriginal program all throughout my public education, you get pulled out of class, and you do these things. And so people *know* that you're Native and they talk to you about it and ask you what your, you know, what your blood quantum is and all this...yeah. How Indigenous *are* you? So, it kinda, it segregates you and puts you in this box. And you're no longer Damyn, you're Native. And that's, that's kind of where you're put in, and...it totally, totally segregates you. And everyone can see it. It's pretty visible. It's not integrated knowledge, I don't think. It's, "you're different, so you gotta

go to this different place, and do these different things.” And it kinda makes you not want to identify with that because then you *know* that you’re being othered.

S: Yeah. So, did you try to just not talk about it, or avoid it, or anything like that?

D: Yeah for sure. Yeah, just avoiding it. Hanging out with people who know me already so I didn’t have to explain that and stuff like that. Just hanging out with people that I’m comfortable with so I don’t have to have that awkward conversation.

(...)

D: So my parents are split, and have been my whole life. In regards to my Indigeneity, with my mom it was definitely encouraged to participate, and she definitely tried...push me to go to more cultural events and stuff like that. Especially when we were taking Indigenous foster children...there was all these events that were coming because of that, and through Xyolhemylh First Nations. So, she was trying to push me towards that, trying to make me go to those. Sometimes I’d be a little bit apprehensive, but sometimes I would go and I would always have a good time. On the other hand, my father, he tended to disregard my Indigenous identity with stuff like blood quantum and, yeah, stuff like that. And...it was just different ways to delegitimize my Indigeneity, for sure. Yeah, it definitely played an impact in my life and how I viewed my identity. My avid participation in cultural events situated my understanding of different nations that I was living in within Abbotsford and the Fraser Valley. Like, understanding Xyolhemylh First Nations, and then Coast Salish, and then through my high school Aboriginal program we would actually go to Mission for example, and then we went on a sturgeon fishing trip one time. And all these events that definitely altered my view of my own identity. For sure. Understanding what I prioritized in my life, and why do I fixate on, and why do we as like a society, as a culture fixate on so many materialistic things, you know?

Damyn’s story resonated with me, as I had similar experiences family growing up. He found it hard to identify as he was growing up, given the mixed messages he got from his parents. His mother, who is Indigenous, encouraged him to pursue his connection to his identity. His father, however, downplayed his son’s identity, focusing only on his British ancestry as being valid or important. I can relate to this. It’s confusing to have one parent tell you that the part of you the other parent is encouraging you to explore is of no value. What do you do with that? What does it say about you, and about your mother, and her mother? As a child you internalize that tension.

In addition, he felt the separation between he and his peers was much more visible growing up in an urban setting when the Aboriginal program pulled him out of class. It

highlighted that he was “the other” to them, and somehow gave them permission to question his otherness and judge his Nativeness by asking him to quantify his identity. In order to deal with it, he hid his identity the best he could from people he didn’t know.

Although he acknowledges he could not fully participate in cultural events as a result of his confusion and shame, his mother still urged him to attend and in the end they helped shape his thoughts and perspective, and he began to question why our society operates the way it does.

Violet

(I asked about the proportion of Indigenous peoples in her territory compared to Kelowna)

V: A lot more Native people. Yeah for sure. Even in Kelowna, you go to Vernon and you see a few...Just hanging out in the city you’re like, oh, hi! It’s good to see that change, even just from Kelowna to Vernon. But even for me, when I would go to the city, and I went to school also in the city...it’s half-and-half. Like, Prince Albert, the city...I’m most familiar with, it’s half Indigenous people, half white people. And other people within that, I guess. Or, non-Indigenous. So, it’s that comfort of like just seeing that. Because Prince Albert’s the gateway to the north. Everyone gets their groceries there. We grew up going to Wal-Mart in the city...all the different shoppings and stuff. So, yeah. Definitely Kelowna’s way different. Whereas even somewhere like Edmonton is, has a bit more Native people there.

S: Yeah, right. So, growing up at home, would you say that you guys were, does your whole family feel strongly about who they are and their history and everything? And their identity?

V: Mm, that’s where it gets tricky. (laughs) So, no. And...I’ve had to learn it over time. Or people can, definitely people are Indigenous in their own way but they, some just don’t really want to identify too much with that just because of the history of residential school and stuff. So, even my step dad who is just...if anyone meets him they would know he’s a Native guy. You just would know. Just the way he laughs, and the way he jokes, and the way he likes to sing country music...so people know. As soon as my friends meet him they’re like, whoa, your dad’s this big Native guy! But he wouldn’t really refer to himself like that. He would say...where his scrip land came from, and the reserve that it’s now, and that kind of stuff. But he just wanted to distance himself from it because...it was tough times for him growing up...it was very tough. And even hearing some of his stories, it’s like, I wouldn’t want to be Native if I had those stories... ‘cause yeah, he just, he had a really tough upbringing so...he has a hard time with it. And sometimes we joke around and we say on our hats that we have, the Native Pride hats, but he’ll always just, oh, haha, don’t wear that! Just that kind of idea to it. But it’s something I’ve struggled with ‘cause I do...get a lot of my identity from him too...When we’d go on medicine walks as kids, or going canoeing, and I feel that’s more of the Indigenous way up north. But he likes to be like, no, that’s just the way it is. Instead of counting it as a Native thing. And my mom, is very proud of where she comes from, and her

heritage. So they're clashed together. But at the same time we grew up in the north, so... We'd do something and then my mom would always bring it back... We'd go wild rice harvesting after when the snow melts, and then we'd be like, oh, why can't we do this all year 'round? And then my mom would bring it back. Where my dad, he didn't. He *did* know, and he could teach us, but he didn't want to. Yeah. So it's just hard with him.

I thought it was brave of Violet to share this with me, as these experiences are very intense and emotional. Violet grew up in a more rural setting with all three of her parents identifying as Indigenous. There are more visibly Indigenous peoples where she grew up in northern Saskatchewan, and in the nearby city of Prince Albert. She was comfortable there, and noticed how different it was coming to Kelowna where there are far fewer visibly Indigenous people.

Her step-father and her mother identify in different ways, with her step-father being more ashamed of his heritage as a result of his history. His hurt was so deep, he distanced himself from identifying with the thing he perceived brought him pain, and so tried to encourage his children to try and be less visibly Native. Although he said "that's just the way it is" when practicing a medicine walk as a way to avoid connecting to an Indigenous experience, the way it is, is Indigenous. Her mother has a different experience and proudly connects her practices with being Indigenous, and explains these teachings to her children as such. Given these differences, she sees her parents as being "clashed" in a way.

Sara

S: Yeah. So, could you just tell me a little bit about being an Indigenous youth? How was school? How was elementary school, how was high school?

S2: ...Very white, blue collar, Saskatchewan, farmer town. There was one Indigenous family in our community and they were your text book, living with grandma, three, very free range. And they definitely struggled because of it. And they had a good home life. I guarantee it because I was friends with one of the three that was my age. And my mom, you know without, she's very good, she's a very good woman, and she very quietly would take a Christmas hamper every Christmas over there with food and toys and things, and go visit their grandma. And often she would visit her because she was a client of the bank, and my mom worked at the bank, and I think she knew. Right? She knew what was coming in and

going out, and it wasn't necessarily that much. But, she wanted to help. And she also probably felt that kindred spirit with this woman. And so, they were definitely treated differently. And it was definitely, oh! They're on the remedial program. Oh! They're on the behavioural program. Oh, oh, oh. They all eventually ended up moving to Saskatoon, moving into different homes when their grandma was sick. She was getting a bit older, and I think they definitely struggled because of it. I always felt really close to Victor (*name changed), who was the one that was my age, and we were good friends. It was very shocking to me because he left in about grade four, and my mom passed away in grade five, and then he came back in grade seven. I don't know what happened, or why he came back. My life was very cloudy at that time. But he came back in grade seven to our school, and was in class for about a week, and then he tried to throw scissors at the teacher. And I don't know what happened to him in between then and...But it was very...it was one of those things where it's like, I think back now and I'm like, no! That moment. Cause it probably, you know that's when people just grab people tighter and shove them to the side again. Shove them, marginalize them, marginalize them. When they could, you know, there are a lot of other opportunities to say, yeah, maybe we just need to wrap our arms around you tighter in a hug. And that might be different than...So, in terms of identity: nothing. It was in our family, they never made a big deal out of it. We'd go to visit my granny in Balcarres which is really near the reserve, so we'd run around barefoot with all the other tanned kids every summer. But I didn't know! I didn't know that they were part of the local band or whatever. But, we did have little ways. My granny was big-time into making quilts and blankets. She definitely carried that in her culture. And like, had a huge garden, and my grandma had a huge garden, and my mom had a garden too. And all very creative and home maker-y. I mean, part of it's maybe being in Saskatchewan, but I think a lot of it when I look back I'm like, yeah! They just didn't...And I have one statue. My mom made it in high school, but it's of a chief and he's sitting cross-legged and he's got his peace pipe. And I carried that thing like, twenty different places that I've lived because it is...And now he sits on my desk. So, I mean that's a little bit further away, but that's where it started. That figure was in my grandma's house in the corner of the kitchen since I was a little girl. So, it's there.

Sarah's situation is much different than Violet and Damyn's. Although she grew up in Saskatchewan like Violet, she grew up in a town with almost no visibly Indigenous peoples, except the family she describes above. Her family didn't make "a big deal out of" their own Indigenous heritage, so she was never told she was similar to the children she played with on the reserve each summer. Given the way her friend Victor and his family were treated by the school and child and family services, they were likely viewed as disadvantaged and did not fit in with the status quo of the town. As a child, Sarah could see her friend needed love and support rather than the marginalization he received, which is reflective of the attitude of the school system towards those who do not fit the norm.

Although Sarah's mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother seemed to downplay their Indigenous identity, she sees the creative, self-reliant ways as carrying on the culture the best way they can. Her identity and heritage was not spoken of, but it was there in the background, like the statue her mother made. This statue is one of the visible, tangible connections to her history, and now sits on her desk.

Hailey

(I asked her how she felt about her identity before meeting her dad)

H: Before, I was just...a nobody. Just a stamped Indian. Kind of, but not really. If that makes sense. It was like, no name Cheerios. You're a Cheerio, but not really. (laughs)

In her humorous quip, Hailey highlights the importance of knowing one's community. Without the awareness of our foundation, we are "no name Cheerios." We are a generic Indian when we don't have a community to identify with. Although I can by no means relate to Hailey's story in the same way as our lives are very different, I do understand not feeling a community connection and how that impacts your perception of your identity. As I grew up and live off-reserve, I often do not feel I am a real Indian. My family always makes me feel welcome when I go home, but I am keenly aware that I do not live there and do not have the knowledge of place as a result. So am I really Musqueam?

4.2.2 Changing perceptions of identity – how life experiences changed the students' understanding of themselves and their identity

Damyn

D: But yeah, that's changed as I've grown, I've noticed. As I've become older I've become more detached to...not expensive things, but flashy things. Things that are impractical. That you get just for that symbol. And kind of in that way I've been decolonizing. Just that, those materialistic aspects of myself. Spiritual knowledge I continue to, yeah, continue to learn. That is a huge thing. Just being on the land, having friends like Hawk who live in Vernon on the reserve. He always invites me to come out and we do sweats and stuff like that. And that's super. It's something that I've actually become detached with recently because of all these school stresses, co-op stresses. I've noticed that like, it's actually started to affect my health. I've been super sick the past two months, and I know it's just because I'm totally detached from the land...I haven't been, I haven't had that time to just sit back and relax, and

notice my surroundings. It's always been one after the other, kind of thing...and then understanding the certain obligations of being on the land. Recognizing that it is, that we are on Syilx territory. Prayer, the giving of tobacco, and not leaving a footprint. That's a huge one for me.

(...)

D: (discussing comfort with identity in school growing up) I felt more comfortable associating myself with being white to all my acquaintances and to the people I don't know. But to everyone else, they knew me as Native. The moment that I knew that I was comfortable around someone I would tell them right away that I identify myself as Indigenous, and non-status specifically. But that definitely changed when I came to university 'cause I knew that I wanted to change those aspects of myself and the way I...participate in my agency. And show everyone that I'm confident in being Indigenous, and knowing that it's not a bad thing to be Indigenous. It's an amazing thing, and there's so many things that come along with it. And also a lot of responsibilities that come along with it as well. So...that was a motive, part of the motivating factor that drove me to leave my home town and to come, come here. Rather than stay in Abbotsford. This wasn't an overnight transition by any means though. I'm still nervous to go out of my comfort zone and meet those new people. But once I took, I started majoring in Indigenous studies, meeting my peers and talking to them, it's so much more comforting, just knowing that, I'm not the only one that's experiencing these struggles. There's so many other people that have like struggles, I guess. But yeah, I think it was just knowing that I could make a positive change here. That's a huge thing. That sense of empowerment, just knowing that, just being confident with my Indigeneity, and then how empowering that is. And then just my willingness to want to go out and change things. (laughs)

(...)

D: And I still feel like, there's still room to grow. I'm not, I'm not at the point where I'm like, a hundred percent Indigenous, you know what I mean? (laughs) I'm about seventy, seventy-five. There's a lot of, there's still a lot of room to grow, for sure. And...it's just the more that I've learned, the more I've come to decolonize and understand the way, how structured everything is. And then, yeah, combatting that structure...I mean, I think it's just that willingness to continue learning. And to never...stay stagnant...you know I just, I feel like I still haven't learned enough. I need to learn more, and I think there's so much room for me to grow and develop. So, no stopping me now! (laughs)

Although not possible for all Indigenous peoples, growing up Damyn hid his Indigenous identity from those he worried would judge him for it. Once he felt he wouldn't be judged he felt safer to share his identity, but the shame was clearly still there. This experience was part of his motivation for leaving his home town of Abbotsford; being able to find comfort in his identity meant moving away. While in Kelowna Damyn has been able to connect with other Indigenous students with similar experiences to his own. As Damyn found connections to his heritage through Indigenous friends he made in school, the Indigenous

studies courses he took, and the cultural and academic programming he participated in with APS he began to decolonize and question mainstream society. He was also able to connect to his spirituality through ceremony, and recognizes the importance of connecting to the land in order to stay balanced and healthy. He acknowledges how we are on Syilx territory, and the obligations that come with being on this land. Growing to own and be proud of his Indigenous identity seems to have allowed Damyn the ability to see the colonial structures we live in, and it fueled his desire to go out and make change. He also recognizes that his journey to decolonize is not over, and he is willing to continue to learn and grow.

Violet

(I asked if her father's silence around his history and identity, or her mother's history influenced how she saw herself)

V: I think both. So, that's why I did...choose to come to school is because of my mom. And that's where I get the both sides from...and more of a healing path towards it. But a lot of who I am now and where my identity fits in is being that young child that...had a really hard upbringing too...it's that...mmm...that intergenerational trauma of having a dad that was really abusive, 'cause his dad was really abusive, and his family was really abusive...a lot of the time when my dad talks about his past with residential school, he would say, you know, he didn't mind it because it would get him away from his parents. I find that really sad. So, a lot of my identity now is trying to heal from that, and gain back my voice. 'Cause it comes from that pattern of my dad not having his voice, and then me having a harder time with mine, I guess.

S: Yeah. No, that makes complete sense. Totally. Wow, thank you for sharing that.

V: Yeah, thank you...And a lot of people frame it in a way that you really have to nurture your inner child, 'cause who you were as a kid is...what you were silenced in. But I'm growing out of being silenced. And how can I find a voice now? 'Cause even with university stuff, I'm trying to be that leader, but also knowing that I should nurture myself, and be kind to myself.

Both her father's silence around his history and identity, and her mother's history contributed to how Violet perceived of her own identity. She notes how her father was abusive when she was growing up which made her childhood difficult, but she also acknowledges that it is a result of her father's family being abusive. Coming to post-

secondary has allowed Violet to see her family in a different way as she can now see how intergenerational trauma from residential school has influenced her family's story, but she also works to balance it with her mother's strength and pride in her identity. Her father did not have a voice, making it that much harder for Violet to have a voice as well, but she is now working to heal from that.

Sarah

S: Do you feel like you have a strong Indigenous identity?

S2: Mm, I'm going to say no. Cause, I think I'll always feel that way, and...there was a little pendulum swing for me where there was a time when I was living in Saskatchewan that I would never, ever tell people. And I think we were raised that way part for safety for us and part for lack of need to. Like if we were passing white then people wouldn't ask and it wouldn't make a difference. And in fact out there it would probably do me less good to go to university and say hey, I'm an Indigenous student, what can we do with that? And they'd be like, oh do you want to go on a special program? They're very behind there, whereas at UBC they really encouraged it for me. So, I started to kind of tip toe into that world. And then I was like, okay, I'm going to go to the pow wow, and I'm going to go to the lodge, and I'm going to go to the siya festival, and the salmon...I wanted to see it all and be part of it all. And I always felt a bit of that, hey, I'm new here feeling, so it was, I guess I always feel that way, so I've stepped back a little bit to just live my own life. But I do feel like I try to do everything with different values in mind now. So yeah, I have a personal identity, but I don't have community affiliation in the way that like, I can to go all the Okanagan Nation Alliance events and feel like I fit in.

(...)

S2: And it almost feels like, it depends on where I go, but sometimes it feels a bit of a farce. If I go home to Saskatchewan and I talk about what I'm studying in school, some of my family, even though they're lovely people, they only have one perspective on Indigeneity, and it isn't necessarily a positive one. And so, they don't really want to hear it. They're like, why are you wasting your time on that? That's what they say! And they aren't trying to be rude or mean. They're just, from their perspective...they've been trained to think that that culture's done, it's not useful anymore. It's just become this burden on society. And so they, they just don't see it because they're not here, in places that are healthier and making those strides forward. I know, it's heartbreaking! One of my family members says that the only thing they identify with about being Indigenous is the fact that they had alcoholism too. The only thing that they know. And I think that's a really sad thing. But in terms of identity, for some, they don't have like, being Indigenous hasn't been a gift, it's been a burden. And that's the way they feel, so...I would love...and then that family member I then, when they visited, said hey, do you want to go to the pow wow? And they came and they were like, tapping their feet, and like, I feel something different suddenly. But not until they had that chance. So, I think it's possible. It's a good sign. It's a good sign that your identity can shift. It doesn't have to just be like, close the door on it. Yeah.

(I asked if finding her identity was gradual or always present)

S2: Yeah, yeah. I did find...I actually...it was a long way around...I don't know. It started with me deciding that I wanted to pursue education in medicine. So I wanted to become a medical doctor, and I really needed to dig into why this never went away for me, because from the time I was pretty young, and then my first experience at University of Saskatchewan was a pre-med. I'm going to do this, I'm going to do this. I really needed to figure out my why, and that started to come through, because I looked at my family and I looked at how my ancestors struggled a bit, and it was all the women in my family. And my Indigenous side is right up the matriarchs, and they all married out of the culture, which I think is sometimes pretty typical. So, you know, my great-granny had undiagnosed diabetes for a long time and she suffered because she was in a small town and nobody knew, and nobody knew what to do so...you know, she lived a long time, but probably because she had her own garden and she had a lot of like, mitigating factors. But, my grandma was a chain smoker. She had a garden too, but she was really less healthy, less active, and I think she had a lot of psychological issues that were bothering her, about...intergenerational stuff like, secrets in the family and things that bothered her. And then, my mom too, she struggled a lot with her weight because there was, there was *more* trickle down effects from, you know, abuse and family stuff and so she ended up passing away really young. So, my great-granny, she was the one to outlive all of the women. But then my grandma died in her 60s and my mom died in her 30s. So I was like, what's going on here? And I don't think that that's an uncommon chain of events for a lot of families now. And so, I really wanted to go help Indigenous community, and I was like, okay, I can't go and work in Indigenous community in the future without knowing a little bit more.

(...)

S2: Yeah, I think that being equipped with the values of community and also talking to some of my friends and saying like, how did you deal with this, how do you deal with this in your family? 'Cause everybody's got somebody who's disconnected, or not willing to address it, or whatever. It just let me breathe with it. It doesn't have to be a yes today, it doesn't have to ever, but as long as you can give me space to be who I want to be, and show up in my life how I want to show up, then that's good enough. But like I say, my answer to them might have been different before that. Being like, no you need to understand this, and hammering it home. So just giving them space to say no, and to sometimes disagree. I've had some genuine debates with family members when they want to dig into it. And then I say, here's my perspective, tell me yours. And maybe I might have something that can help you think about it better. I don't know. I've got two sides in my family. I've got very hard-working, white, colonial, farmers on my dad's side. And on my mom's side I've got this very quietly Indigenous family with a lot of deeply-seated, historical issues that they're trying to work through. On their own mostly because they don't talk to each other. Which is the best they can do, is just to stay away. But I don't know. They all have their opinions and I just try to give them space. But, also probably why I did the geographical cure and moved here. That's what they call it, you know. I can stand them from a distance, but if I have to be in the centre of all that, that would be really difficult. So I just removed myself.

(I asked her if it was difficult to have those conversations)

S2: I'd say, bring the challenge. Because you know what, I am strong enough in my why that I don't need to worry about what other people think anymore.

(I asked if it was a gradual process to get to that confidence)

S2: I think once I made the decision, for me, I'm a pretty integral person so once I make a decision I find it really hard to go back on it, because I feel like that's...it just shirks who I said I was going to show up to be.

S: Right, it feels like betraying yourself. Right? Yeah.

S2: Right. Or the others I've committed to by standing beside them. And so I don't feel like it was ever an option for me to go back, so I was going to figure it out. I was going to reinforce that. But it definitely has – it's not easy to stand up and say, I want to be in the middle of these two worlds. Because a lot of people do treat me differently because of it. Some people treat me better. Some people treat me less-than. I actually just don't care anymore. I can't. And it's their unfortunate burden to have to look at me differently because of it...And I know if I give them space – the worst thing for me, they say if you're trying to drive out an injustice, forgiveness is actually the way to fight against evil. Because if I don't forgive somebody and I just hold on to that, and if somebody's treating me differently because of who I say I am, then I'm actually just perpetuating it. Because in some way I become like them. So, if I stop it and I say, I forgive you for your lack of perspective, or for your opinionated view or whatever, then that shows them more than if I just spoke away, or hold on to it and be angry, because then they're like, wow, she's still generous and kind to me. Even though I'm changing. There's no room for it in my world anymore. 'Cause I've tried the grudge, the resentment to all my family, to people...I think it shortens your breath, and it shortens your life to just be resisting. I don't know. I want to forgive them before they speak, and that's my goal. Yeah, I'm no angel, but I'm trying to help people have different views if I can. If they want it.

While she was growing up, her family did not own their Indigenous heritage. From what Sarah knows, it was safer not to identify given where her family lived, and they did not feel a need to identify as they looked non-Indigenous. When she “did the geographical cure” and came to UBCO she was able to explore her Indigenous identity, and to see how colonialism has influenced her family's story and relationship with Indigeneity. She learned the importance of community and participation in cultural events which allowed her to learn new perspectives on her family. She saw how her family's shame and intergenerational trauma that rippled through the generations pushed them to avoid identifying as Indigenous, seeing only the negative stereotypes as being the Indigenous experience. Sarah reconnected to the values of community, and was able to accept and understand her family differently.

These learnings allowed her to approach her family gently when discussing their Indigenous heritage, and to give space to them rather than forcing her ideas on them.

However, Sarah also expressed feeling “new” to the community, and although she is no longer purposely silent about her Indigenous identity she is aware that she is walking between two worlds. This can lead to being judged by both worlds at times, and she acknowledges how some treat her differently as a result of her choices. She noted how she will likely always feel like she is new and so may not ever be able to say she has a strong Indigenous identity, but her commitment to working in Indigenous community has pushed her to learn as much as she can.

Hailey

(I asked if she felt she had a strong Indigenous identity)

H: ...since meeting my dad, yes. I did early grad, so I was done high school in January. I wasn't a really big fan of people I went to school with. It wasn't like, I didn't feel really safe. (laughs) ...I don't know. I just knew that I was done. High school didn't really offer me a sense of somewhere to really flourish. Aside from little, weird things. (laughs) So, I met him January nineteenth, two-thousand and ten.

(...)

H: It was really interesting because I met him, and it was a Wednesday evening, it was really dark, (laughs) it was really icy out...It was actually really interesting because my youth worker at the time, it was technically my adopted brother. And the mandatory counselling that I had to see after going through some stuff...is my dad's wife's sister. So those are two pivotal people in my life, had those series of events not occurred I probably wouldn't have met him when I met him. So in grade nine I went through some stuff, and went to mandatory counselling. Where would you feel comfortable? Blah, blah, blah. Would you feel comfortable going to a counsellor within Westbank First Nation? And I'm like...sure, it's close...so, within the first week she knew who I was and I knew who she was, and I could either continue working with her or not. And you know, there's those fuzzy lines. Should she have continued working with me? (pause) Who knows? You know, and then working and being part of the youth group, but never being allowed to be fully part of it, or like have access to certain things. There was other things too like, growing up, when I was 12 I started attending the recreation snowboard program. And so from there I grew and I was able to be part of the team, but not as a Westbank First Nations member. You know, there's always that little bit of a divide. You're either WFN on the WFN team, or you're a First Nations community, outer community on the WFN team. And so there was definitely different opportunities that I missed growing up. And even going to school there was, in high school I remember there was something like Toastmasters? Still don't know what that is but, I wanted

to do it because everyone else was doing it, but I wasn't WFN. So it wasn't a thing. But when I graduated high school I was a WFN member. So I became a status Indian in April that year. (...)

H: I gotta rewind for a sec. (chuckles) Touching back on the identity thing, after meeting my dad they had, they were going through a whole bunch of things in their family at the time. Like who isn't? Whatever. And that's when I was like, well, I've been going through this for the last five years I kind of don't have...(baby cries out)...shh. I'm like, I kinda don't really care what they're going through right now. I've been going through this for a good chunk of my life right now, so here I am. I had prepared myself for rejection. We made a drum as part of the Ab grad. Things I picked up was I beaded. That was, I don't know it was just something I do. I'm always doing something. (laughs) To say the least. (laughs) But I found a lot of comfort in it. It was like a, I don't know if it's like a Pan-Indian thing now, right? But it was something I was able to pick up, and I picked it up in one of the community classes. (baby noises) And I made a drum as part of the Aboriginal grad, and while I was making it they were like, yeah, you give it to somebody that you really respect, or you know, blah, blah, blah. So, I made it, and I decided while I was making it, you know, I'm going to meet my dad. And if he chooses to know me, then whatever. If he chooses to not know me, he can keep this. And I knew who he was, I knew *how* he was. I also worked for them on and off throughout my high school career. 'Cause his wife hires kids off the rez to kind of do odd jobs and get paid cash. I was in their home, I knew who they were and what they did and how they were. And so, I had all these residual feelings from my mom telling me that she tried to get me status when I was a baby, and she tried to get him to sign the forms and whatever. I'm also the product of the last year that my dad drank. And so he was sober when I was born. (pause) Healed? Probably not. Really fresh? Probably. Right? So, I had to kind of really find where I was at with, that's not my shit. I'm a young adult about to do all this young adult stuff, and you can be with me or without me, but I need you to know. I need to know that you know who I am. And so when I went to go and meet my dad, my youth worker went first. And he's like, I have a youth that would like to meet you and speak with you. And as he left the front door he told my dad, and she's your daughter. She's coming here as your daughter. And...I was at a friend's house, and they came and picked me up and brought me over to the house. And...they just opened up their arms and hugged me. And...I'm not a hugger. Right? I grew up in a family that does not say, I love you, unless you are drunk. Those words have very little meaning to me. And no one hugs you or kisses you or holds you unless they're drinking. And so I was very skeptical and very not trusting. (chuckles) And sort of like, I don't know what that is. What did I sign up for? So. We sat, we talked for hours at their kitchen table. And they kind of talked about different things that had been happening. My dad kept on...this probably'll make me cry...he kept on going to their front window and looking out, and his wife asked him, what are you doing? Oh, someone's coming, la, la, la. He had been doing this for months. And I had been planning it for months. And I was putting a lot of energy into it. Yeah...my grandma lives kind of up in the hill a bit, and that's where he would go to get his fir boughs for his sweat, and he was always drawn to that road. And that place. (chuckles quietly) You know, and then I...I must have seen him a thousand times before I knew who he was. (chuckles/cries) So, that's a little bit of me. (laughs) And yeah so, we talked. And before this, I was like, ceremonies and I wasn't as into it, whatever, I...maybe smudged. (laughs) You know, everything that I had experienced was pretty much through the Ab ed program. And after that I, they asked me, they were planning on going to a ceremony that weekend. They were like, you wanna come with us? And I'm like, hop into a

vehicle with people I don't know? Sure. Go to something that I've never experienced? Why not? Sure. So, a couple days later I met my sister, and I knew about her. I knew that he had two kids in Penticton, boy and a girl. I knew that he had adopted one or two, I don't know if he adopted the two siblings. But, there's his wife and then her sister, and they're she's I don't know. He had adopted her kids so that they could get status so they could go to school. And whatever. So he had adopted kids he had, you know, kids lived in and out of their house the whole time that I knew them. I'm like...how do you not know me?

S: Yeah, right. Did he, I'm sorry, do you mind if I ask, did he really not know that he had another kid somewhere?

H: He did. And that her name was Hailey...So there was a lot of talk in my young childhood years, community and whispers, blah, blah, blah...but nobody bucked the fuck up. (laughs)

S: Wow, that must have been so much weight to carry.

H: And super infuriating. (laughs) Did you really not know? I'm like, do you not remember that time when we were standing in the community or in the multi-purpose room kitchen and you asked me who my parents were? I remember every single thing about that day. About that moment. The door was half cracked, the sun was shining, it was really bright. You had just come in from doing an opening somewhere, and you were coming to help your wife come and load up her car, 'cause she had cooked and done some of the facilitating for a program...how did you not know? And they're like, they remember it and they remember talking about it after. That was a really odd answer. Oh, he's kicking around here somewhere. I wonder whose kid she is? (Laughs)

S: That must have been completely exasperating, Hailey.

H: A little bit. (laughs) I'm like, maybe they'll figure it out on their own. Maybe they'll say something to me. Maybe they'll be the adult... Child of an alcoholic, you're always wondering that...Oh yeah, and then, identity. So that weekend they asked me if I wanted to go to winter dance. I don't know if you know much about winter dance. So, winter dance is a ceremony, happens in the winter, there's dancing. (laughs) So it happens in the longhouse...And if this part doesn't get written down, that'd be great. Just thought I'd give you some insight, a little bit. (Explains more about the ceremony, but I did not transcribe it at her above request) I had never experienced anything like that. And there was, at that specific dance that I went to, everyone spoke the language. All the singers spoke in the language. And I was really, like, that's part of my language story is why did I get into language? And I'm sitting in this room not knowing anything, people are shaking my hand saying, way'! And I'm like...mhm, mhm.

I don't know, you know? It wasn't until halfway through, and you shake everyone's hand, you know? And I didn't know. And...there was one familiar face that I knew, and that was Mark (*name changed). And that's really gonna make me cry. (pause, crying) Being the only person, you know, in a brand new setting like that ...it was, it was different. And so I was going to go back to language 'cause that's, you know. So, language. I kind of assumed that everyone understood what everyone was saying. And I'm like, I have to know what they're saying. I have to catch up. And so the first five years of knowing my dad I felt like I had to

catch up. And I felt like everyone had experienced everything, and that there was no way I was going to be able to catch up and know everything that everyone else knew. I obviously didn't go to Sensisyusten, I didn't have any of that, but I still grew up with the other kids that went to Chief Tomat (editor's note: Elementary School). Then everyone gets funneled into CNB (editor's note: Constable Neil Bruce Middle School). After that ceremony, we only went one night, but it's usually a two to three night, sometimes even five nights, type thing. (More explanation of winter dance) But those songs, in that setting...it was, it was like something (baby squeaks), it was like that missing piece. It was like, it felt like I went, like I came home...And I don't know how to...everything that I felt like I was missing was, all of a sudden, right in front of me. So...(laughs) After that weekend, I still had finishing up 'til the end of January, I went back to school and I was in the Native room, sitting there. I was reading a book or something. Mark comes in and he's just, you know...Mark. (laughs) And he goes, so what'd you think? (gestures) (tearful) And he was like, well, you can't just stop going now. And...so, I went to a few more that year. Actually, that was the year I went to actually quite a few of them. First I went with my dad. And one thing I didn't know was that my dad didn't go to them all the time. He went to a few of them. So I went to those ones and after going, there's almost one I swear every weekend. (chuckles) And...I sort of started to kind of smarten up a little bit...and...I don't know I was still...(baby cries out) (Whispers to baby: Just stay asleep. Shhh. It's fine, you're fine, I'm fine. Sorry, I got a little emotional there.) He can feel it...Yeah on April twenty-first, two-thousand and ten, was when I decided to sober up. And...that was that. So I had, from those ceremonies...it really grounded me. And the food that I ate, and the people that I met, and the songs that I heard, and the hands that I shook...there was always that peace that I was looking for. I mean you can't read it in a book, you can't...(laughs) So, it was really interesting because I started to get to know my family in Penticton more. My sister and my brother come from a really large family down there. Our family here in Westbank is actually quite small. There was a, I can't remember who, but my dad's mom and dad both had lots of siblings, but they all died kind of thing. So there's a huge knot...huge, missing...and so my sister's family in Penticton was also very open to me. And my sister's mom, she's kind of like a second or third mom to me. And, I also started going to ceremonies sort of on my own, 'cause my dad's like, oh I can't make it. And I'm like, well, I think I'm going to go anyway. (laughs) Right? And my sister's grandpa, he's passed now, but he's also a singer, but I remember him...he's...we were in one of the longhouses (removed this section as it describes some of the ceremony). I was coming around and he's like, yeah, we dance this way in the winter and then we dance this way in the summer. And...I got to learn more and more and more. And then they were at a, my sister, one of her aunties was, they had family dinners every week. Something I never...what is this? And then I got to get to know her sister from her mom, who's a year older than me...and, I did a lot of sitting and listening, and I could tell that she was planning on going canoeing. And I'm like, oh, that's different. You know, I think of canoeing I think of two people in a little red canoe. Floating around, wherever. And she's like, oh! We need more people, oh, hey! We need more people. And my sister was like, well, here, see if Hailey can go. And Jolene, she's like, okay, there's rules to be part of their canoe. You can't be on your time, you know there's all these different protocols and rules, and you have to be sober for ten days, before you can step in their canoe. And I was counting, and I was like, ten days ago I just stopped. May two-thousand and ten is when I started canoeing, and then I canoed with them, and that's when I went on the Pulling Together canoe journey. And that year it was from Port Moody to Semiamoo. (laughs) And...I wouldn't have been allowed to go unless I

was...sober, or even strong enough. But, I had a lot of experience kayaking and weight-lifting. And so it was really interesting because...luck of the draw, I had the ability to pull. And I became part of a tripod, which is the bow of the canoe. It wasn't just one person, it had to do with the tripod. And so who I pulled with, I filled someone's spot who had left the canoe group. So I became valuable. (laughs) I don't know how to word that. But, it was that summer I learned so much, and I started to get comfortable singing, 'cause that's not something that just happens. (laughs) It's not...a skill. It's just there. (laughs) And so I remember being, oh man, I suck at singing. But, that's kind of like, that was a really big year. And then also that summer I did an intensive immersion into language. It was a three-week, and I did that, and then I started at En'owkin in the fall.

It sounds as though Hailey had very few people in her life that supported her outside of her Aboriginal Advocates in school, given her family's relationship with alcohol, her mother's denial of her Indigenous identity and refusal to tell her who her father was, and her step-father's racism. Although she didn't meet her father until she was finished high school, she learned who he was much earlier. In grade nine she went to counselling after a very difficult time, and her counsellor turned out to be her father's wife's sister. Rather than lose that connection to her family and community, she chose to continue seeing her despite knowing she still could not talk to her father. She also was not able to participate in community programming as a full Westbank First Nation member, even though she knew her father was a part of the community.

Later in our conversation (see page 26) Hailey refers to a time when, after discovering who he was in grade nine, she actually had an interaction with her father, but he does not realize it is her. The fact that she continuously ran into her father and his family but had to remain silent was clearly difficult for her, and her grief was still being processed as we spoke; even her son felt her hurt as he cried out in his sleep when she mentioned a particularly painful experience. (Note: When we later talked at the talking circle, Hailey had processed a lot more of her grief and hurt, and was healing from her years of silence.)

When she finally was able to meet her father, she was welcomed with love and hugs, something she was not used to in her mother's house. Her father shared how over the preceding months, as Hailey planned her introduction to him, he could feel that someone was coming to visit, and his walks often took him past Hailey's grandmothers over the years. It seems that despite being forced to be apart for so many years, they were always connected to one another.

Regaining her connection with her father also meant a connection to the community and to the culture. Although the Aboriginal Education program is very valuable, as Hailey's experience illustrates, it cannot make the deeper connections to the culture and to ceremony. She could now attend ceremony, and at the first she attended she felt like she came home. It impacted her deeply, and it marked the beginning of her journey to learn her language as she saw how important it was in building her connection to herself. While at the ceremony she ran into a friend from school. He had already made that commitment, and told her she had to mean it and keep coming to ceremony now that she had chosen to take that first step. This was emotional for her to share as he was a good friend. Not long after graduation Mark passed away suddenly, and the pain of his loss is still felt in the community to this day. Hailey pursued ceremony and cultural activities that grounded her, and so was able to let drugs and alcohol go from her life. She says it was the "luck of the draw" that she had the ability to pull in the canoe journey, but I see it as more than that. When we are on our path and ready to take the next step(s), things often fall into place like this. Hailey took the time to explain how her family was all connected. Although to some listeners/readers it might seem that this could be edited out, I see it as showing how she gradually became more knowledgeable about her own family history, and showing me how she fit into it. It also shows how she was able to learn from them all in order to get to a point to be able to pull.

4.2.3 Defining Indigenous Identity

Damyn

D: ...Wow that is difficult. I think it's really just about how you participate in day-to-day simple things. It might be just, you know, having garbage on you and keeping it in your pocket, waiting until you get to the garbage can, you know what I mean? It can be something so little, but, you can relate it back to an Indigenous ideology, or traditional ways of knowing or thinking. So, yeah, you can look at it big picture or small picture. And I think...I think it's easier if you just contrast it and think of like, what's the colonial way to do things? And you just kind of oppose that. And that's one of the major ways that I've been able to decolonize myself. Being brought up in a city...I think of all the ways that, you know, that city life kind of influenced me and how I can relate that to like the colonial, assimilation process. And think about the ways to Indigenize that process so...

For Damyn, Indigenous identity is about embodying an "Indigenous ideology" in his day-to-day life the best he can. He notes how it can be seen in relation to the "big picture or small picture" as not all of us are in a situation where we can fully participate in the culture, but using the tools he has gained in post-secondary he works to oppose colonialism as best he can in an urban environment. He notes how the city can be assimilating, which I can understand as being in the city often means there is no community to belong to, and we often have to blend in.

Violet

V: I would describe it as constantly changing. It's, it's very fluid. There's not one way to look at it. Or not one way to be a Native person. It just constantly changes and it's changing with my age, and when I'm learning about different things. 'Cause growing up as a kid you're kind of just that kid who knows...life's a bit different for you than it is other non-Indigenous kids. And then just how to be a part of that world too with not growing up in it. (...)

(pause) Mmm, community based. Everything is about community, and coming together, and making sure that each other is supported. And then, working in the frameworks of that understanding that people just have it really hard when they are Indigenous. And no matter which way...I could think of it...You know, it's hard growing up in poverty living in the north, but it's also really hard living in the city and say being taken away from your culture or not having that. So, I think no matter where you come from if you choose to, I guess, self-identify, that it comes with a lot of you know, this stigma about it or the inclusion. Yeah. I think I'm not, I don't know, a philosophy person. I can't really put it in words, but there's way more. (laughs)

The fluid, changing nature of Indigenous identity means there is no one singular way to be Indigenous. Violet talks about how her identity changes as she ages and learns new things. As a child she knew her life was much different than the lives of the non-Indigenous children, but maybe didn't fully understand why that was. She did not grow up in their world, but had to try and learn "how to be a part of that world too."

Violet stresses how community is a central part of Indigenous identity, where community members belong and are supported by one another. But she also notes "that people just have it really hard when they are Indigenous," as no matter where you are from or what your history is with your identity, it is likely there have been struggles and stigma in your family story given our history of colonialism in this country.

Sarah

S2: Yeah, you know what, I ask myself that a lot. Because I was like, okay, what amount of appropriate clothing can I wear to show my Indigenous identity without being overt? Is it silver bracelets, is it shirts that have, you know, special things on them, or is it little earrings with... But, I don't think that there's a way to necessarily, I think you've gotta wear it in your heart more than anything. And so, I don't know. I mean, as a 21st century woman you're taught to, I was taught to express myself through the way I dress. You're either a punk rocker or a pretty princess or whatever. So, my identity I could wear through my garb, but that's not real. And so I think, I was doing it already a little bit teaching yoga, but honestly it's the values of community and knowing when to speak and when to stop. Cause that's not, I was walking in to the room and like, oh! What do you think, can you tell me more about this? And it was a bit much for some of my friends that grew up in community. They were like, shh! Sit down, you don't get to speak, the Elders speak. You know, so, there's a way to do this. And I still struggle with that a bit. Don't we all? But, I think that's part of being, I think your identity is just stepping forward. For me it's stepping forward when I want to shrink back, and still identifying even when it's not, for other people, going to be comfortable...I had a...one of my good girlfriends...the place she was living, she basically lived in the carriage house of this really fancy family, and he's a very prominent professional in town. And I caught him outside of the garage one day and, hey! How are you? Doing the pleasantries. And then he said something about how the municipality had traded land to one of the local nations, and how upset he was about it, and he'd already gone to the MP about what they were going to do with this land, cause he just thought they were going to trash it right? And on and on and on and on. And I just, very quietly said, you know, those people are my people. And he was like, oh! You know? Just very, kind of, taken aback. Didn't have much to say after that. But, I just need you to know that you don't know who you're talking to all the time, and you can't assume, and that that's not really fair. So I'm sure that he would, at

that point do a little different math in his head and figure it out. So it wasn't comfortable, but I needed to say, stop. Because it's not right. And that's, that's all I needed to do. But it happens a lot. When I wanted to step back and just be like, oh, what a jerk, I just stepped forward and let him know, a lot of people here aren't who you think they are. And we're just normal people, so stop thinking it's like this *other* crowd...Which is the values. If I had gone from my, maybe my more assertive, colonial voice I would have been like, hey! You know what? You know, just get a little bit up in there. But I think the most beautiful thing that I've learned from people, Elders and people that I've been spending time around is very immersive. They never tell you how to do things, they show you. And less is more. Often. You don't have to explain it; people will figure it out. It's kind of like a riddle. The mystery. Leave the mystery.

As Sarah explored her Indigeneity she soon learned that expressing her identity was not about external things such as what she wore, but it was about feeling the values of community in her heart and embodying them. She shared the difficulty of learning how to behave in certain community settings, which makes sense given that she was raised to blend in to the western culture.

Using a story of an interaction she had with a friend's landlord she shared how she has learned to identify, even when it is not comfortable to do so. Rather than adopt a more confrontational tone as she might have done in the past, she chose to gently show this person that his behaviour was not acceptable. It can be very uncomfortable to stand up to someone when they behave in misinformed ways. For me it is anxiety-provoking. But Sarah is now able to embody the teachings she has learned from community in order to teach others, much like the storyteller leaving it up to the listener to figure out the meaning of a story.

Hailey

H: Indigenous identity is not the process of doing, or the act of doing, but the process of knowing...You can go to a ceremony a hundred times. Person A, person B can both go to the same ceremonies, know the same people, do the same thing, and it becomes like a (baby fusses) world of connectivity, and opening your mind and your heart. (baby cries) And so if I had to define, what is it? Indigenous identity...(pause). It's knowing that you're not just a piece of paper. It's encompassing...is that the right word? That you're not just a stat. It's...knowing through and through who you are and where you come from. It's having a sense of community. It's knowing your family and your bloodlines. And I say this from my own experience and my own perspective, and I understand that a lot of people don't have

that. It's fighting to know every missing piece to your puzzle. Because our people have experienced sooo much. You know, the good, the bad, and the ugly. It's understanding those broken strands in our DNA, and why...it's like a shattered mirror. And you're never going to get every piece back. It's never going to look the same. (laughs) And when you look at yourself, and you look deep and down, it's never what you imagine it's going to be. It's like having your...if you envision being able to see as a child, and then having every ability and vision stripped. You cannot see and you're blind. We're moving through this world picking up this information, putting it down. You know you feel it you hear it you smell it. You never see it. And then when you can, if you're ever given your sight back, it's never going to be what you thought it was. Indigenous identity...I don't know if it would have been easier if I always had it. I literally had to go out and find it. And it wasn't always what I wanted it to be, or dreamt it would be. I mean, there's different ways to look at it. I mean, you know, I look at the people in my life, and you know I have some certain family members who grew up with it, had it, it was given to them, almost on a silver platter, where everything that I know to this day I had to fight to know. And it wasn't given to me. It wasn't shared to me by people that I knew or raised me. Always. But...it's so hard, that's a really hard thing to define...because I have the idea of so many perspectives 'cause I've been so many people, you know? When I went back to university after having my first son my perspectives are changed, 'cause I was now a mom...It was really interesting to see how my instructors perceived me differently. Grown, changed, matured, whatever. (laughs) (pause) You know, some of my nieces and nephews...they're blonde haired, blue eyed. My son is red haired, blue eyed, and my oldest son is fair-ish. Light hair, but brown eyes. Identity has always plagued me, and the thought of it, if I came out looking white I would not have questioned why. And so for me identity has also been how I look. (chuckles) And so I fear for my son. That he's not going to be dark enough. Because, I remember being part of the Native kids that excluded...other kids. And so, I don't wanna transmit to my children that identity is just what you look like. I want them to know what I know now, starting from a younger age. (chuckles) I mean, seventeen forward, bam! You're an Indian! Go! Bibbity, bobbity, boo! There you go, and run with it. There's a point, and that was, it was really hard in those early, early years of being an Indian (sing-song voice), one of my dad's sisters sat me down, or we were driving somewhere and she was like, man, you've done a lot! What do you mean? Well, since you met everybody, you've sure done a lot. You've canoed, you've made baskets, you've gone digging, you picked berries, you learn language, you blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. She's like, you've done the work of ten women over the cour-, what might take up a lifetime in two years. You do this, you do that, you're at hunting camp, you shot a bunny, can't catch a fish – still have not caught a fish to this day. It's not meant to be. The day I catch a fish. I mean, I've tried! With a pole, with a gaffe, with a net, whatever. (laughs) But as a child I envisioned what I wanted to do. My auntie, and different community members that I spent time with talk about how open kids are to different things, and to experiences, and to things that we can't see as adults. Or feel as adults. And I remember those things as a child...that I...I prayed really hard to remember. That I shoved away so far down because I thought I was crazy. Because I thought I was weird or different or...nobody was there to tell me, or to show me, but that's okay. And that's something that I hold resentment for. (laughs) And it's like...identity is really hard to define because it's different for everybody. I know full-blooded Indians that would give anything to just be white. Where is their identity at? You know, are they Indian-sick? Are they, you know, are they whatever? Is their one drop of Canadian-Euro blood stronger than the rest? You know, is that how they identify? I think that sometimes you don't get to choose

how you identify. Is your identity what you choose it to be, or what is chosen for you? See that picture kind of in the middle of that five? (gestures to her family pictures on wall) Top corner? The one brown kid. (referring to herself) (laughs) Like, what the hell?

For Hailey, identity is a process of knowing rather than doing. She sees Indigenous identity as being deeply connected to community and cultural practices, but it is more than just going through the motions of ceremony. It is about connecting in a very holistic way through your family, your blood, your spirit, and your heart. However, she also notes that part of our Indigenous identity also comes from being broken and fighting to get ourselves back, which almost never looks the way we envision it. Hailey had to actively search for her identity as an Indigenous person throughout her young life, and many of us have to do this given our colonial history that has habitually separated Indigenous children from their families and their Indigeneity. She also calls attention to the difficulty in defining Indigenous identity using strict parameters as it means so many things to each person, depending on their own experiences and the perspectives they have learned as a result.

As she grew up visibly Indigenous in a visibly non-Indigenous family that downplayed her heritage, identity has also been about how she looks. Her youngest son is less visibly Indigenous than she is, and she is concerned he could face difficulties growing up as he looks different than his family. Some children are taught to exclude others, judging them based on someone else's perception of what it means to be Indigenous. To avoid this identity confusion in her children Hailey is committed to passing along what she has learned throughout her identity journey, so her children grow up knowing their identity is more than their looks.

Through her active participation in ceremony and other community practices she rebuilt her connection to her spirit, working to remember what she had forgotten as a result of "shoving it so far down because I thought I was crazy."

Internalized colonization told her that her spiritual side had to be repressed, much like how internalized colonization drives some Indigenous peoples to “give anything just to be white.” She sees Indigenous identity being partially what we choose and what is chosen for us, and we are always navigating these choices each day. Hailey could have chosen a different path, and done what her mother and step-father chose for her to do by ignoring and denying her Indigeneity. However, despite knowing their desire and knowing how her family perceived her, she dealt with her situation based on how she felt about herself and pursued her connection to her father.

4.2.4 Indigenous identity in elementary and high school – how public education influenced identity

Damyn

D: Uh, it was interesting. ‘Cause, through being in the Aboriginal program all throughout my public education, you kind of get, you get pulled out of class, and you do these things and stuff like that. And so like people *know* that you’re Native and they talk to you about it and ask you, like, what your, you know, what your blood quantum is and all this...yeah. How Indigenous *are* you? So, it kinda, it segregates you and puts you in this box. And you’re no longer Damyn, you’re Native. And that’s, that’s kind of where you’re put in, and...it totally, totally segregates you. And everyone can see it. It’s pretty visible. It’s not integrated knowledge, I don’t think. It’s, “you’re different, so you gotta go to this different place, and do these different things.”

(...)

(I asked if the Aboriginal program was supportive as well)

D: For sure. Just having that space. Like, it’s very similar to having this space here on campus. We had like a glorified broom closet in my high school of fifteen hundred kids. That was our Aboriginal room. So, but even just staying there for lunch and stuff like that, you know. It was a safe space that you could go to. And, also the TA that worked there she was Métis, and she assisted one of my best friends. He goes to Queens now and he’s on almost a full scholarship, and it was all because of her. She did all she could to help people get to where they need to be. And, yeah, and help them pursue their goals. I’d relate it a lot to here, because this is where I felt comfortable just coming from high school because it was very similar. So, yeah. I think it was just the, the way that they tried to do it. I think, you’re trying to integrate Indigenous ways of being, ways of knowing and, you know, recognizing that there are Indigenous people in the school, but you’re also othering them. And putting it in this mandate that fits like public education systems. So it’s just, I don’t think it was done properly, necessarily. They tried and I think it was the, you know, the amazing people like

that TA I spoke of previously that made it work. But I don't think the system itself is necessarily working out.

In both elementary and high school Damyn participated in the Aboriginal program, where he often felt being pulled out of class for separate programming segregated him from his peers, causing them to see him first as being Native, rather than first seeing him as Damyn. This othering also seemed to give his peers permission to ask him to justify or prove his Indianness so they could judge how different he was. This can be very confusing and stressful without a good support system. For Damyn, who was struggling with what it meant to be Indigenous, it caused him to feel different, and he was constantly reminded of his differences.

However, the Aboriginal program was also an important support to him. Despite the small size of the Aboriginal room, having a safe space was important. The tutoring proved to be very beneficial for his friend as well.

He noted how the schools are othering Indigenous students in their attempts to support them as the programs are not very integrated. Although the individuals working within the program make it the success it is, such as the tutor he spoke of, the colonial system makes it difficult to do more meaningful programming.

Violet

V: I'm not sure if for my elementary school that there maybe like wasn't enough resources, or it was just a smaller school, but I was told from a really young age that I wasn't going to be a smart person, or I had a learning disability. So, really young I was always set up with that self-defeating purpose of not, I wasn't going to do well in school. And even now I...I have a form of a learning disability with reading. It just took a long time for me to try to get me into reading 'cause, I'm not always...it just doesn't work out the way I want it to. And just 'cause I learned to read way later. Yeah, so, in school it was tough with that, with just trying to be more academic I guess. Or trying to be like the other kids who would just get away faster. And then my mom having to sit me down at the table every night and try to go with, do it with me, and we'd both get really frustrated. Yeah, so that was kind of what schooling was like. It was really tough. And I...mmm...my mom sometimes thinks it's really weird I'm in school. Just 'cause, you know, I wasn't supposed to be that kid let alone be the

only kid from my family that's really gone, except my sister and she didn't live with us. So...my little sister is now, one of them is...just struggling with school, and they were texting on my group chat, and my older sister said, but remember Violet? Violet was the dumbest kid, remember? Violet was special needs! And now look where she's at! (laughs) My little sister's like, I feel good about it! And I was like, whoa, even just to think of that. This happened just recently and I was like, I was! I was in that special class. I was not with the other students; I was with myself. Yeah, I was on a computer trying to learn about witches, and all the grammar that went with that, and I just didn't get it. Yeah, so that was kind of what school was like. It was harder. I think you might get more funding if you're special needs though. I enjoyed school 'cause I liked...(laughs)...I liked the fights that happened. (laughs) Everyone always fought on the playground. I thought that was funny. And we'd just play soccer and be active, so I liked it. Just somebody different than my siblings. Yeah. (laughs) There was a lot of Native kids at my school...Yeah, so it was really...it was nice. Yeah. Sometimes...(laughs)...sometimes the Dene kids and the Cree kids didn't get along, so that was always interesting. So, I liked school. (laughs) Yeah, it was always interesting. I did like school though. And I was always a bigger kid. I was a little chubby so I could always just make jokes. And just beat people in chicken fights, where you try to knock someone off the post, or in soccer and stuff. (laughs) Yeah, I liked it like, school, elementary school. Yeah. And then in high school it became a lot about us like...It was more sad time I guess, 'cause we just started learning more about ourselves, and then just dealing with different alcohol and drug use, and how that was affecting us at that time, so, yeah... (...)

(I asked if the school had any supportive programming for the Indigenous students)

V: ...programming. They have a youth group. Yeah. And then also the church would try to recruit people. (laughs) Yeah. They had that too. So the church would always offer cake if you came, and juice, which was really cool. They had that programming. Mmm. Yeah, kind of a youth group. They didn't have an Aboriginal centre or anything.

S: Right. Yeah. Oh, okay. So did it ever try to connect you with your Indigeneity or anything like that at school? Or was it just kind of like, you're here to do school and that's it?

V: Oh no. Definitely not. But a lot of people were Native at the school. So it was just there...part of it. But, no, not that I knew of. I don't think so. And all of the teachers were non-Indigenous too. I think there might have been one teacher...yeah, probably one. And you'd know by their family last names that they're not or they are. Yeah, so. (laughs) I only remember the one teacher 'cause she was a Cree teacher! (laughs) Maybe there was Dene teachers, I forget.

As a child in elementary school, Violet was labelled as having a learning difficulty.

She was often separated from her peers to do work on her own, and required a lot of support from her mom throughout her education. She notes how “really young I was always set up with that self-defeating purpose,” where she believed she could not do well in school. Now

that she is in post-secondary, much to her family's surprise, she is a role model for her sisters.

Despite the isolation in her academic world, she enjoyed the social aspect of school, finding amusement in sports, the fights on the playground, and spending time with her friends, apart from her sisters. However, as she got older she noticed the environment changing, with the students dealing with their own issues around alcohol and drugs. There was no Aboriginal room at her schools, perhaps because of the higher Indigenous population there: "...a lot of people were Native at the school. So it was just there...part of it." I couldn't help but wonder, given the difficulties she mentions in high school, and the predominantly non-Indigenous teachers, some cultural or emotional support may have helped some of the students.

Sarah

S2: ...Very white, blue collar, Saskatchewan, farmer town. There was one Indigenous family in our community and they were your text book, living with grandma, three, very free range. And they definitely struggled because of it. And it probably wasn't like, they had a good home life. I guarantee it because I was friends with one of the three that was my age. And my mom, you know without, she's very good, she's a very good woman, and she very quietly would take a Christmas hamper every Christmas over there with food and toys and things, and go visit their grandma. And often she would visit her because she was a client of the bank, and my mom worked at the bank, and I think she knew. Right? She knew what was coming in and going out, and it wasn't necessarily that much. But, she wanted to help. And she also probably felt that kindred spirit with this woman. And so, they were definitely treated differently. And it was definitely, oh! They're on the remedial program. Oh! They're on the behavioural program. Oh, oh, oh. They all eventually ended up moving to Saskatoon, moving into different homes when their grandma was sick. She was getting a bit older, and I think they definitely struggled because of it. I always felt really close to Victor, who was the one that was my age, and we were good friends. It was very shocking to me because he left in about grade four, and my mom passed away in grade five, and then he came back in grade seven. I don't know what happened, or why he came back. My life was very cloudy at that time. But he came back in grade seven to our school, and was in class for about a week, and then he tried to throw scissors at the teacher. And I don't know what happened to him in between then and...But it was very...it was one of those things where it's like, I think back now and I'm like, no! That moment. Cause it probably, you know that's when people just grab people tighter and shove them to the side again. Shove them, marginalize them, marginalize them. When they could, you know, there are a lot of other opportunities to say,

yeah, maybe we just need to wrap our arms around you tighter in a hug. And that might be different than....So, in terms of identity: nothing. It was in our family, they never made a big deal out of it. We'd go to visit my granny in Balcarres which is really near the reserve, so we'd run around barefoot with all the other tanned kids every summer. But I didn't know! I didn't know that they were part of the local band or whatever. But, we did have little ways. My granny was big-time into making quilts and blankets. She definitely carried that in her culture. And like, had a huge garden, and my grandma had a huge garden, and my mom had a garden too. And all very creative and home maker-y. I mean, part of it's maybe being in Saskatchewan, but I think a lot of it when I look back I'm like, yeah! They just didn't...And I have one statue. My mom made it in high school, but it's of a chief and he's sitting cross-legged and he's got his peace pipe. And I carried that thing like, twenty different places that I've lived because it is...And now he sits on my desk. So, I mean that's a little bit further away, but that's where it started. That figure was in my grandma's house in the corner of the kitchen since I was a little girl. So, it's there.

S: Right. Yeah. So it was always there in the background maybe, just not necessarily talked about or whatever, right?

S2: Yeah, exactly.

(I asked her if school, being a colonial structure, worked for her where she grew up, or if she struggled)

S2: No. I was at the top of my class. I was fine. But I don't know, I can't tell you if that's because my parents didn't identify me, or whatever. But I do remember, all I remember is learning about like, we would go to the Louis Riel site, and we would go to...oh, shoot, what's that called? It starts with a "b" I think...Batoche! All these different places, but it was always like, and here's where the women would weave clothing, and here's where the battle happened, and we're moving on. It wasn't, it wasn't like a true depiction of what it was actually about. It was more like, we made it through the resistance and now we get to live here. And that's all I knew. And it wasn't necessarily painted as a bad thing or like, or as bad as it should have been maybe...but it, I don't know. I don't think it impacted me at all, frankly. Maybe that's sad. But it didn't give me any leg-up on knowing who I was. Nobody wanted me to care. I think that was the goal. They just didn't, they prefer if you don't ask any questions and just fall into line. Interesting, right?

In contrast to Violet's community, Sarah lived in a "very white, blue collar, Saskatchewan, farmer town. There was one Indigenous family in our community..." Using the story of this family, she shows how the colonial system tends to blame Indigenous kids, no matter what their situation, which keeps the destructive cycle going. It punishes the children for their behaviour rather than helping them to deal with their pain that is causing it. The three children lived with their grandma, did not have much money, and struggled in

school; not an uncommon story. As is and was common practice with child and family services, the family was split up and the children sent to different homes. When Sarah's friend returned years later, he was now old enough to act out the pain of losing his siblings, mother, and grandma in more physical ways and was marginalized as a result.

Not surprisingly her school did not support her Indigenous identity or encourage her to explore it, and her family didn't make "a big deal out of it." She did great academically as a youth, and notes "I can't tell you if that's because my parents didn't identify me..." Sarah also noted how the school presented the children with a very specific version of history that ignored the Indigenous perspective. It also did nothing to help Sarah know about her heritage, but as she said, "nobody wanted me to care."

Growing up she visited her grandmother in the summer who lived near the reserve so she played with the children there. At the time she did not realize they were First Nations and that she too was Indigenous as no one ever told her. Despite this her family did still preserve some practices that demonstrated their connection to their heritage. The one visible demonstration of the matriarchs' heritage was the carving her mother did of a chief. It was at her grandmother's house, always in the background when Sarah was young, much like the family's Indigenous identity. Now the carving sits on her desk at her house.

Hailey

H: So, I actually didn't know I was First Nations until I was about in grade one, and there were other brown kids. (laughs) My mom, I was raised with my mom. I'm the product of two alcoholics and a binge weekend, type thing. (chuckle) My mom was a single mom, with two kids, and she worked probably ninety percent of my childhood. I grew up in the care of my brother, who's ten years older than me, and my auntie who is...twelve or fifteen years older than me, and my grandma...who's a lot, like, fifty years older than me. (laughs) She's got some years on me. So yeah, I didn't know that I was actually First Nations until other kids would ask, so where you from? Why? I dunno? Here? (laughs) It wasn't until, there was the First Nations room. And I had an Advocate, and at that point I was...accidentally included with all the kids. They didn't have me on the list. My mom didn't identify me as being Aboriginal, but I look like everyone, and I hung out with everyone, so I got kind of, any time

there was an event or an activity I'd get shuffled off anyway. At the time my advocate was Sara (*name changed). And so she was my advocate throughout elementary. It became more prominent in grade three, four. And then in grade six I was finally a self-identified Aboriginal student, when my mom agreed to sign the form...it was, I dunno. When you can think of a black sheep situation, (chuckles) if you look at my family photos I'm the one brown kid. But, I mean, it was always kind of shoveled off, or sloughed off. And I was...the Italian side of my family, they're Sicilian, and they're really dark. And they're like, oh, you're dark 'cause of that. But...my mom was sort of in a denial that I was, that I had another part of me.

(...)

(I asked if the school was supportive of her identity outside of the Aboriginal education program)

H: It's like accidental ignorance. If that's a statement at all. (laughs) No, I hear you. I'd say it was really interesting. It was always really weird whenever anything Native or First Nations came up, or Indigenous - that was not even a thing yet. I'd always be asked, so are you Native or First Nations? And I'm like, pfft, I don't know. Or are you Indian? That was just becoming taboo to say, or do I say that? Kind of that cusp of that...I know that my advocate, as an elementary student, she really pushed for me to get that signature as self-identifying before I went into middle school. So, she recognized that it was a tool. Outside of the Ab ed program, I don't know if it was the Ab ed program, or if it was the teacher individually, but they would bring in people...like what I kinda do sometimes. Bring in people and present and stuff. I dunno...it's kind of assumed that you know how to do things. Or, assume that you're going to be really good at making dreamcatchers, or little miniature drums, or toilet paper totem poles. Not knowing who my family was or where I came from, I was really kind of looking. And I researched from a young age, different Native groups. And I knew I had to find out where I came from to even have a chance of knowing where I could possibly go. And I know the librarian was really actually supportive. 'Cause I'm like, I'm really interested in learning about Natives. She's like, oh? (laughs) S'up? And I'm like, I really don't know where I come from, and I want to know when I do find out. So she gave me everything in the library that was associated, and I just read it all. Middle school was when I actually found out who my family was. So that was pretty shocking. But in respect to my mom I wasn't to contact anybody...and that was really difficult because I found out some of my closest friends were my cousins. And, I found out certain individuals that were already sort of, not mentoring, but role models sort of. 'Cause I would hang out at the youth centre as a town Indian. You know, not quite within the statistics, 'cause within anything like that they keep stats. You're always a stat. Everywhere you go. And so (giggle), I was always classified as other First Nations. Middle school, it was really tough 'cause I was twelve years old when I found out who my dad was, and where he actually lives, in the proximity of my life, it really shook me. (laughs) Passing his house every day, to and from school...it was just, it definitely threw me for a loop. (laughs) And so, yeah, and actually having them being like...facilitators in my life with different programming. And you always get the question, so where you from? Who's your parents? I remember in their program, and they'd been part of our program for a little bit now, and then they asked me one-on-one, I'd stayed behind to help clean up, 'cause that's just (gestures)...who I am. (laughs) It's what I do. My dad asked me point blank, he had come in late, and so he's like, so, who are you? I'm like, my name's Hailey...You know? And I was screaming inside. I'm like, I know who you are. Can you not *see*? And he's like, oh yeah. So what about your dad? And I'm like, oh, I don't know he's kicking around here somewhere. And then I'm like (gestures) really big eyed, hello? And his wife was standing

there. And whatever. Nothing. Not a spark, not a nothin'...So I went back to cleaning dishes. (laughs) I was twelve. It was within months of finding out who they were. And I found that out through one of my mom's friends, who wasn't supposed to tell me...And that was the same year that I left home.

S: Oh, imagine that. Huh. Holy. Well, that sounds like it must have been really emotionally...turbulent? I guess would be the word. (laughs)

H: Something like that. So that was right around the time that a lot of things shifted for me. Like going from honour roll to not. (laughs) Yeah...you know, you can pick one way, or you know one way, and then you're like, I'm going to go jump in the other way, 'cause this isn't working for me. (laughs) So, I, of course, chose the rougher path. And continued hanging out with my family, and...yeah.

S: Wow. So did you find that helpful then, just to kind of keep that connection? Or was it hard?

H: Actually, at first it was really hard, and...I hold so much resentment. And even to this day it comes out. And I don't, I'm still working at, through that. And sometimes my dad asks me, he's like, are you mad at me? And I'm livid. He's like, what's going on? You know we have a good relationship now, but I'm still mad that we missed out on seventeen years. And I knew for five. And I'm going to try really hard not to cry. I just felt my face twitch. (laughs) So, my advocate in middle school was Leslie. There was somebody there for the first half of grade seven, I don't remember who that was. She was on her way out. Yeah. Some older lady. But yeah, so Leslie. Yeah, she was hilarious. I told her who I was, and what I was going through, and who my dad was, and I told her my situation. And she was really supportive because she knew...she knew...She knew everybody and everything. You know, she's married into this community, and she's lived here forever so...yeah, it was helpful.

(...)

H: Yeah, there was another advocate there. And I didn't know her very well, and didn't get to know her...I think she was retiring too or something. So, the first bit of high school I mean. And yeah, high school was weird. Middle school outside of the Ab Ed program, I went to Constable Neil Bruce...and, I don't know if it's just the time in life, grade seven to grade nine, or if it was the school, or the teachers, but it wasn't a good experience. It wasn't even just the kids though. There's specific staff members where if I ran into them to this day I'd probably punch them in the face. (laughs) I remember one teacher, any sort of disruption and it was to the park. And the park was like a place for at-risk kids. And...any chance it was a Native kid, there was like some blatant racism from the teachers. Some of them. Not all of them. But there was just a few of those older ones, you know? (laughs) I'm sure you've never run into that. But yeah, you know. Just the usual stuff. (laughs)

S: Right. Yeah. And did that change when you went to high school? Did it feel a little bit better by then? 'Cause by then you would have known...you'd known who your dad was for a couple of years. Did you feel like you were in a different place once you went to a different school?

H: ...If I could have just been a normal kid, then probably. But I was also, you know, somebody a little bit different. It wasn't just the fact that I was Native, but...I hung out with a darker crowd, you know. Known drug users and dealers, and you know just super classy people. (laughs) So, I mean, aside from that...there was definitely opportunity to grow a little bit more in high school. Towards the end of high school, I did a few independent studies. One of them was, touching base on libraries again...I did a, not like a book report but I went through a bunch of the titles within high school. So I read about twelve different books over a semester, and I did a comparison between authors that were Native and that wrote...there were a couple books that were about Native, whatever. They wrote from personal perspective. Some of them were not related to being Native, but whatever. And then some of them were non-Native people writing about Native...ness. And it was really interesting and I started kind of delving into that topic. And it was the Aboriginal tutor that kind of pushed me in that direction. And it was kind of when I got to find some of my favourite, pivotal Aboriginal...Indigenous literature. That's when I found Sherman Alexie and like, fell in love with his stories. And then, later on, I got to meet his mom. Before she passed away. She was a fluent speaker. And they're from Spokane area, Cor d'Alene, which is still an Interior Salish language. And so, later on in life (laughs), it was cool because I got to hear her speak, and I could understand parts of what she was saying. But she's since passed, so that was kind of neat. And I got to meet him. Lame, but I love it. (laughs) (...)

H: First Nations twelve, that class (laughs), it was taught by a non-Native teacher. And she was really young, and very open and very caring and open hearted, and kind of, you know, there was room to grow. For sure. And, it was just very interesting how that class, it was a small classroom, probably (gestures) from that wall to here, and it was, I don't know, seven, seven, seven (gestures) desks, and there were six facing this way (gestures), and somehow all the Native kids ended up in this little section. And then all the non-Native kids were over here. And, you know, that happens in every class. You sit with who you know. And who do you know? (laughs) And...the teacher would always look over and be like, is this how you say this? And you'd be like, a tribe off the coast. It's like, I'm sorry, I am not from there. And it's not like a (gestures) language. What is it, thirty-two different distinct languages within BC? And that's just broad languages. That's not the little languages. (laughs) So it was like, no I'm sorry I don't know how to say that. Yes, you're probably going to butcher it, but so would I! Just those types of little things. Or, is this how I do this? Yeah, that was just ten years, almost ten years, yeah that was ten years ago. Eleven? Nine years ago?

Hailey didn't learn she was First Nations until she was six-years old, and it wasn't because her family told her, it was seeing other visibly Indigenous children that looked like her and who asked her where she was from. Her mother chose not to identify her as Indigenous, but as Hailey is visibly Indigenous she made friends with the other kids who looked like her, and was included in the Aboriginal education programming at her schools. When she was 11 her mother agreed to identify Hailey as Aboriginal with the school, but

although her mother no longer completely denied her heritage she, along with her family and step-father, continued to downplay Hailey's identity. While in elementary school she found people assumed she would know how to do Native-inspired crafts, even though she herself was still searching for who she was. Fortunately, the librarian was supportive of her search and helped her find resources in the library for it.

When she was 12 she learned who her father was, and a few months after learning this ran into him and his wife at an event. Despite her trying to hint at who she was, he did not recognize her. This dynamic definitely had an impact on her identity through school. Although she was screaming inside, she was unable to directly approach him as she had promised her mother she would not. "And it was the same year that I left home...that was right around the time that a lot of things shifted for me. Like going from honour roll to not."

Throughout school the Aboriginal Advocates proved to be a huge support for Hailey, acting as a safe place for her to share her story and to belong. This was especially important during middle school when some of the teachers' "blatant racism" caused them to stereotype and discriminate against Indigenous students. The Aboriginal tutor, who she clearly respected and was from a neighbouring community, also supported her identity search, encouraging her towards Indigenous literature. She quickly grew to love Indigenous writing, which acted as another type of support for her. Interestingly, the First Nations 12 course was taught by a non-Indigenous person who unwittingly stereotyped the Indigenous students, assuming the Indigenous experience is universal and asking them questions about language and cultural practices she as the teacher could not answer.

4.2.5 Indigenous identity in post-secondary – how post-secondary changed perceptions of Indigenous identity

Damyn

D: I think I just wanted to leave Abbotsford! (laughs) That was, that was the main point, and I saw post-secondary as a good way to escape that and, kind of like, start a new life, in a new city. Somewhere I'd never really...I think...I went to Kelowna like, twice. And I had one vivid memory of being in Kelowna when I was like 13, 14, and driving up here and just how beautiful it was, and I think I was playing football, and it was just an amazing experience. And that was my, how I thought of Kelowna as a kid and then...I just, I already knew it was a beautiful place and...just a lovely place to be so I thought, why not escape there?

S: So how would you say that being here at post-secondary has changed your Indigenous identity, or just your identity in general?

D: I think it's, it's motivated me to use what I have and to...I don't know, that's a tough one. It's...kind of perpetuated my passion for creating change, I guess. I wanna, because I go back and I look back at how privileged I was, always having food at the table, good loving mother, you know I had a brother to help me when times were rough. Like, all of this support system and just kind of how there isn't really that same support system for most Indigenous youth growing up in rural communities or reserve communities...Yeah, in terms of my identity it's kind of reinforced what I want to do, and who I am, I think. Yeah, I wouldn't be who I am today without post-secondary. And I think I wouldn't wanna do what I wanna do without post-secondary. I...don't even want to think of where I would be right now if it wasn't for post-secondary. Just because it's helped me out so much. And it's, you know, things were blurry when I got here. I didn't really know what my path was, or how I would get there, but slowly it's become more clear as the years have gone on, and I think it's the very same way with my identity. I've...it was very puzzling and I didn't really know like who to identify with or what to identify with, but I think as the years have gone on, the more I've learned the more it's become clear who I am.

Just as Sarah had done the “geographical cure,” Damyn wanted to move away from his hometown and so came to UBC Okanagan. Coming to post-secondary has motivated him to use what he has learned in order to give back and make positive change. He is able to reflect back on his history and see his privilege. Being aware and being able to situate himself better will help him with his work. Over the years post-secondary has gradually helped him learn both who he is and what he wants to do; his path ahead has become clearer and he is able to embrace his identity.

Violet

V: Yeah, it definitely changes with coming to school, that's for sure. 'Cause then you start to understand a lot of the things that impact you on a more personal level, like residential school in a more academic way, and see how other academics think through it. 'Cause I'm not a person who's overly reflective of that kind of stuff, but I've been gaining that knowledge. So that's where a lot of my fluidity with it comes in. I don't have to always be the funny Indigenous person, or the always happy Indigenous person. I can be more thoughtful, I can be in any which way when... Yeah, it just can change over time.

(I asked what made her decide to come to post-secondary, given how her mother was her inspiration and her mother also was surprised she chose to come to university)

V: Mhm. I think with my mom it's about...compared to a lot of Indigenous people and Indigenous kids, youth, where I'm from, I'm soooo lucky to be my mom's kid. Like, so lucky. I can't even tell you how grateful I am, because my life would be...oh, so different if it had been without her. 'Cause she travels to a lot of northern communities, and tries to improve health care, and improve development for younger children, and does it from a cultural perspective. But also acknowledging the different psychology needs of their developmental age, and what they need for their sensory, for their emotional, and how you can incorporate culture into that with young kids. So she travels around the north and does her programming and that. Yeah, so I was always inspired by my mom. I wanted to be like her sooo much. I think she has a degree in education. And then yeah, and she just goes to different communities, and because she's connected to her culture she can...incorporate those ideas and those ways of being into that. So, that's how she inspires me. But, I remember first year she'd get super annoyed, because she'd have to look over all my papers ten times and be like, really? How does this make sense? Oh, I guess it doesn't! She's like, okay. So, yeah, she'd just try to make me get my papers done a month in advance and keep reading over them. And she'd give me tips on how to put them into Google Translate...'cause I just, I'm not a writer. But, yeah, coming from my mom, I wanted to be involved in making healthcare more accessible. And that's a huge part of what's lacking up north. So, making healthcare better. And I see what she does, and it makes changes right away. Even if it's a few kids at a time, or a few workers. She really empowers the workers, 'cause who's going to be working with the children? So, I've always been super inspired by her. Yeah.

S: Yeah, I can see why! (laughs) Aw, that's awesome. So, coming here, I guess, kind of made sense. Or coming to post-secondary anyways...

V: Yeah. I applied to all of them! It's like, who will take me? Let's go. I applied to so many. (...)

V: Why here? Okay, well, this answer changes over time too. When I, I think when I was just coming out of high school, they offered a free trip out here. And I was like, whoa, they have enough money to give people *free* trips? And then I came out here and experienced the people, and...I needed that change at that point. So, I could go to U of S or Alberta 'cause those are more manageable cost-wise. But, that's a place that's associated with so much trauma for me. And so many people that I know that I would never be able to say no to. So, if

I wanted to come to school for school, I had to, it had to be for me and I had to be selfish in that way. Because if I stayed, people would constantly be so distracting, and I might not be able to stay in school long. 'Cause I've seen that happen too.

(I asked if she knew she was going to go into Nursing)

V: No. No, I thought I was going to be a doctor. (laughs) So I studied biochem for the first two years. They do make it challenging. 'Cause a lot of even the prerequisites, I didn't have the prerequisites to really be in the program. And then competing with people who were just *so* lucky to have advanced placement courses, and IV courses. And I'm that kid who didn't even take the prerequisites 'cause they didn't have them offered, so... Yeah, definitely was setting up, myself up for not doing that well. But I'm also glad I'm in nursing now and I have more of ...taking Indigenous studies perspective too, taking a few courses and understanding it on an academic side of things. And then being able to share with now my first year nursing class, and first year nursing. And telling them about like, to be more like, challenging them, and working with them through what their thoughts are and stuff. I've just...been around a while. (laughs)

(I asked if being at the institution had changed her Indigenous identity after three years)

V: ...yes. Definitely. I needed to be able to find the words. And I needed to be able to say what I'm feeling in a more academic way, or say what I'm experiencing...And then constantly being so involved with hearing different perspectives of different Indigenous people all over. It's *so* reaffirming and reassuring, you know, that there's other people out there that have also struggled and also have that understanding. So it's constantly changing. And sometimes putting it into words makes it so much easier to understand. 'Cause when I first came out here I was just so over talking to my dad. I was just like, I'm so, I'm so frustrated by you. I just don't wanna even associate with that 'cause it's so toxic. But then coming to this school and, learning about, you know, residential schools 'cause they didn't really teach that too much, and you kind of hear about it off and on, and you're like, kay dad. But you don't really understand. And I'm starting to understand and hearing the stories, and just the time period we're in now it's just like, wow. And then when I go back and talk to my dad I really have that understanding. I'm not like, I'm just, more thankful, more grateful. I'm not hateful anymore. 'Cause I was....But, I don't know with school. It would help 'cause even some of my other siblings just can't...don't understand and...don't talk to him also, so. (...)

V: When I was in high school you wouldn't've hear me saying, "this is 'cause of colonialism!" (laughs) When it is! Probably say something rude about white people, but...(laughs) You know, it just changed so much to be able to have the words. Being, non-Indigenous, and like...(laughs)

Violet immediately acknowledged how post-secondary changed her identity as she was able to connect what she was learning in class to what is happening or has happened in her life. As she said earlier, Indigenous identity changes over time. Being able to reflect on

her life differently with new understandings allowed her to change and grow, and to see herself and her family differently.

Coming to UBC Okanagan meant another “geographical cure,” as she knew attending a place closer to home would be difficult since “people would constantly be so distracting, and I might not be able to stay in school long. ‘Cause I’ve seen that happen too.”

Although she wanted to be a doctor, Violet moved into Nursing after finding she did not have many of the pre-requisites to get into the program as her school didn’t offer them. However, she is glad to be in Nursing now. She has also taken Indigenous studies courses that gave her a new understanding and awareness of her life that she now is able to share with her Nursing cohort and professors. This not only benefits them, it also helps Violet so she will have a better experience in her program, and it helps future students who will not have to face the same situations as a result of Violet speaking up.

The connections with other students also was “reaffirming and reassuring.” This community has been a large support, and made her time at university more meaningful as their shared experiences strengthen their relationship.

Violet also spoke of a need to be able to find the words to express herself and her experiences, and coming to post-secondary helped her with that. Being able to put things into the words that accurately expressed her feelings helped her to understand those feelings more clearly. This also meant she understood her story more clearly, and could see her family differently. Many of us carry sadness and anger towards our relatives, not understanding that their behaviour is often a result of their own traumas at the hands of the colonizers. Once we can see the full picture of our history it allows us to let go of the anger and begin to heal, and this then allows us to become more supportive and empathetic. For Violet she can also now see how this knowledge could help her family.

Sarah

S2: So I begged a third-year professor to take the Indigenous studies course, and it was the one that took us to the TRC. So, it was my very first course, and I talked to this professor over the summer and he said, it's going to be a pretty heavy course, are you sure you want to do it? And I have a background in psychology so I said, I think it'll be okay. And I ended up clearing my schedule to go on this bus trip, and that's not typical for me because I'm very busy. I was like, okay I'm going to do it, and I got on this bus, and I went to the TRC, and I called my brother in Saskatchewan and I was like, listen, we gotta talk to our family about this. Do you want to know about this? And he was like, yeah, I think I do. And, you know, I just started digging in to the school work and I, at that time I guess, happenstancely started seeing an Indigenous fellow, and that led me down a whole cycle of seeing unhealthy patterns in families and difficulties and struggle. And realizing that, I might just be a fly on the wall in that situation, but I also wasn't much different. My family had those issues too. And, the next summer I drove out to Ontario. I drove all the way out and visited all my family along the way to try and find out as much as I could, talk with them, have those hard conversations that they hadn't been having. And I had like, I went all the way to Kenora. My cousin Shawn, and he's like, he's actually my mom's cousin but he's in his late 30s, so we always called him cousin Shawn. Anyway...he was the end of the train, but he was also the hardest of everyone in my family. He just had crossed arms. I don't want to know about that ever. These people are not my people. Whatever. He grew up in Winnipeg. Pretty hard life, right? His mom was a single mom, like very typical of the...so, he just didn't want that experience for himself, and that was fine. And I at that point, by then I had really learned to hold back my opinion and not soap box him. But just this past fall, he reached out to me and said hey, my kids are going to need this for their own health and wellbeing. Can you share what you know with me? I know! He went from like, nope, nope, nope, to like, please. You know, and so you give people space and years, and they figure it out. But, I guess getting back to your question, I don't know. I don't always feel strong in who I was, but I think that opening the door to it and understanding I'm never going to be able to speak to those women on the patriarchal side, but to understand why they moved the way that they did in their lives and how things happened for them, gives me a really compassionate perspective. And so that helped me to understand my identity a little bit, and where I'm going and why. I think, yeah, it hasn't always been strong, but that's the path. And so I ended up with one course short of a minor in Indigenous studies, and really wanting to pursue more things around Indigenous education so...

S: So, you kind of already answered this: Do you feel that going to post-secondary made an impact on your Indigenous identity? It sounds like it did.

S2: Yeah. Yes. And specifically here, 'cause even when I was living in Calgary it wasn't like that. It was still like, ooo, they just want to buy up all the land around the city. It wasn't very immersive or invited. I don't know. It was a community at university with APS, and even the professors were really like, they challenged me as a person, not just as like, here's how you should get the best grade in this class. And I went through some moments of real struggle with professors that were like, nope, I want more. I want something different. Keep trying harder, and I'm going to make you guess. And it wasn't in the traditional way, it was like, 'cause I need you to figure out who you are. That was really frustrating. Because the rest of my degree was like, here's your syllabus, here's what will be on the test, work really hard,

and you'll probably get an A. That's an easy formula. But in the true nature of Indigenous education, Indigenous community, it's more like, experiential learning. And I'm definitely not going to tell you how to do this because I need you to think for yourself, figure out what works for you, and how to get there. And so the model that I had used for a long time was not useful. Although it was helpful, it was also frustrating because I felt like, in some instances, the teacher was really on my side, and sometimes it was like they were trying to keep me out of community. And so it just depends. I won't give you names now. And I feel like there's a certain amount of protecting one's culture that's important, sure. But when somebody's keen and wanting to learn, especially when someone's putting in the effort to like, even discover their own family and do all that. It's not like I'm just putting a headdress on and being like, I'm going to be First Nations now. So, give me the time of day. Give me a chance to step in beside you and learn this.

Going to UBCO opened the door for Sarah for her to look at her history differently by providing her with an opportunity to go to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission event in Vancouver. It also was a time when she dated an Indigenous man, and started to see some similarities between their unhealthy family patterns. The following summer she spoke to family, trying to learn about their Indigenous history. She met with resistance from one cousin in particular as he had a difficult upbringing and he only associated being Native with the negative stereotypes. However, she gave him space and years later he approached her asking for more information. The truth will come through when it is time and when the people are ready.

Although she recognized she would never be able to speak to her relatives who had passed on, she had gained an understanding of why they did what they did and so learned about her own life as well. This knowledge helps us become more compassionate, and as she said, empathetic (much as Violet said, above). It also helped her to find a clearer direction in her life.

After living in three different provinces and attending post-secondary institutions in each, she noted Ontario and Alberta seemed to have a more obviously negative attitude towards Indigenous peoples. At APS she found a supportive community, and the Indigenous

professors changed her thinking. Indigenous education is much different than her other courses and it required her to shift out of a colonial mindset. At times she struggled as some professors seemed to be trying to keep her out of community despite her desire to connect to her own history, but there were others that she felt were more supportive of her journey.

Hailey

H: And yeah, so I ended up moving to Penticton and kind of embraced everything. I ended up being kind of like a live-in nanny for my sister, which worked at the time. I had started school at En'owkin, and that was really interesting, 'cause that was my first taste of post-secondary, which is sort of like an odd space to start in the beginning. And definitely totally outside the realm of what I had planned....so I started taking entry level classes or whatever, and I'm like, well, I'm going to be an Okanagan teacher, an Okanagan language teacher. My dad's an Okanagan language teacher. I could be an Okanagan language teacher. I wanna. (laughs) So I started taking classes, and it was Richard Armstrong, Marlowe Sam, Loren Terbasket...I can't remember his name. Holy crap, I can see his face. He's like an English teacher there. No idea. And then sciences and stuff. But those first three really shaped a lot of my thinking. And all of this is going on, I'm part of community events and, Penticton's a really...legit community. I mean Westbank is very disconnected and very corporate, where Penticton has community. You walk down the road and...I don't know, just feel that community.

(...)

H: Yeah, so, staying in Penticton, I started doing classes. I did a semester, and then that January is when I took a semester off and I went and lived in a house in Chopaka with five ladies. We did immersion. It was definitely changing...it was just something to do. Two feet in, right? I was young. I was 17, turning 18. Yeah. Nothing like that had ever been done in Canada before. And I'm like, sure, why not? (laughs) We probably didn't have enough language to be there at that time, but we did it. It wasn't always comfortable. I mean, you take five women at all different ages: 17, 25, 28, 39. No, 58, 42. No, fifty-something, 42, 28, 26, and then 17. Just graduated high school...they'd kinda done some classes in post-secondary, in their masters, doing their PhD, has their masters, kinda thing...one going through a divorce, one experienced a divorce, and the other one happily married. Basically, virtually five strangers. Women. And you eliminate your primary way of communicating. I mean, there's feelings. (laughs) Apparently there's feelings, and yeah, there's definitely some rough patches, and not being able to communicate in certain situations, and roll with it, grow from it. And I went back to En'owkin the following September. And I did a year there, and then it was time to transfer to UBC. And so, basically from what I had gathered at En'owkin was you do as many classes as you can here, and it's supported through NVIT, and whatever. And then you transfer all of your course credits up to UBC, then you finish up there. So...I met Adrienne and somebody else, I don't remember who was with her, at En'owkin. And then I was so...not resentful (laughs), but like, rubbing the cat's hair the wrong way. How open and whatever that I am into these types of situations, I did not want to go to university. I was comfortable, I had community, I felt safe, and happy, and growing, and thriving. And they're like, okay, now you have to go to university. And finish out your degree there. So my

goal was to get a Departmental Standard Term Certificate in Okanagan language. I went to UBC and the courses that I needed to complete that were not offered. There's supposed to be an MOU in place between En'owkin and UBC, that these courses were offered. And I got there, and they weren't. I couldn't sign up for classes, I couldn't do anything that put me in the right direction towards that certificate, and so I got put in the Access studies program, and I went from En'owkin being in six classes, my every day was full, I had motivation, and I was killing it. I went to UBC and they're like, you can only take three. That gave me a lot of free time, and I lost a lot of my focus, and I filled my time up with other things. And I probably could have focused on school a lot more, because I was in that mind set. I started out taking two classes, four classes, six classes. And then I had to take classes there, and I'm like, well I've done all these language classes I'm going to keep going to Penticton. So I was going to UBC and Penticton. And I could do that because UBC and En'owkin didn't communicate. So I was taking something like six or seven classes. 'Cause I filled my time up in Penticton. So I got put into...they matched up my courses and that's when I got put into the Indigenous studies program.

S: Right. So when you first came to university, you talked about what a community En'owkin felt like, and just Penticton in general. So coming to UBC, how does it compare?

H: I was very resistant. I was very pissed that I had to be there, and I was very pissed that they didn't have the program that I was supposed to be entering...When I got there I felt like I knew who I was, and...retrospect, (chuckles) 'cause that's always awesome, I guess I would have looked sort of like a spoiled brat. You know, I knew who I was, I knew where I was coming from, and here I'm in this big pot of stew with all these other people who don't know who the fuck they are, or what they want, or where they come from. And I had fought so hard to figure out where I came from, and I still had no idea where I was going. But I wasn't going to let anyone else know.

S: Right. Yeah, yeah. Well, it makes sense. So did you feel any sense of community going there?

H: I know that the APS program tried really hard. (laughs)...it was, the Ab room, the Native room, it's always a room. That's been a running theme in my life, is there's always a room or a space. The Native room with the Native kids. The APS room, the APS centre. So I mean, there's always that, it was nice to have a home base where you can go and be around people who (can't hear – stir? Stare?) a whole bunch of town Indians, not knowing, right? I think it would be different, I don't know how, what it would be to be a Native person not in my territory, and going through that. And so I did develop a lot more, a lot more perspective, and a lot of, (sighs) compassion. I want to say compassion, but I'm definitely not the easiest person to be around sometimes. Not the most warm person sometimes. (laughs) But, I definitely...the sense of community that was there, it was pretty good. It was really interesting watching people, the different stages of their life, or different stages of their identity, or different, you know. I did a lot of work with Margo Tamez and she's all about finding yourself. Me-search. And I mean some of that was really difficult for me because...well, you heard my story. (laughs) And I guess that's why it's a lot easier for me to talk about that, and I can kinda breeze through it a lot more now. But when I was sort of discovering who I am today, the events, and the circumstances, and the themes, and the

situations, and the people, that all shaped who I am. And having to pick through them, and having to fine-tooth comb them. It was really, it was almost traumatizing. (laughs) And also, university being a time of being in your early, your late teens, early twenties, and something that I noticed is mental health issues that kind of surface in that time frame for people. And having a history of depression, and all these different things, to be in, during that period, in that time frame I was diagnosed with bipolar, and I definitely did not know how to incorporate that into my me-search. (chuckles) I'm a whole different person. Right? That's a whole different identity. So, just the different community within the Ab room, I mean, it was...it was good that there was a home base. Community within the university? I definitely didn't reach out. I wasn't really part of the bigger picture. I was kinda there 'cause I had to be there. And also being sober, it doesn't really leave you a whole bunch of social situations to get to know people.

S: Right, yeah. No, for sure. Would you have wanted to? I mean, it doesn't sound like you had a need to, but would you have wanted to, or were you just kinda like, meh, whatever?

H: At some points of my years there I would have liked to. I would have liked the option, but if you're not drinking...those social situations get to be really dry. (laughs) You know, I don't know, I've run into that every now and then where it's like, hmm, this situation would be so much easier if I was drinking too. (laughs) I'm like, mm, I'm not feeling that. I don't get what's so funny. (laughs) I could smoke you all at that drinking game right now 'cause ya'll are wasted ...and having a bar on campus, it's not like, I don't know. It's just different.

(I asked if attending post-secondary had an impact on her Indigenous identity.)

H: I'd say that it, university, it's such a huge...concept. It's not, on pen and paper, black and white, university is a place where you seek higher learning. And you don't just walk away with an education, you walk away with an experience. I would say that, it definitely has impacted my identity, specifically in the fact that I was sort of put into an Indigenous studies degree. I literally had to study Indians. (laughs) And I mean I had always felt that separation from early on, and so it was really easy for me to read about other people. But when I had to really read into myself and sort of strip those roots and really get to know them, and smell them, and feel them, and dig them, and dig deeper, and find the root, and find the core, and find the why, it was really...it was really painful. (pause) I can hear Margo in my head. There's still moments. She's definitely in my top three favourite instructors, and I have a lot of respect for her. (pause) The growth that we experience from these different instructors definitely shape who we are, and I wouldn't have had that experience had I not been in university. I wouldn't look at a baby board and see a methodology. I wouldn't have the perspective of, I wouldn't even use the word perspective. University has given me a perspective, and I really feel that between myself and my partner. He attended trade school. That is A plus B equals C. You know?

S: (chuckles) Right...Yes. So, you do get a perspective it's just a way different perspective. (laughs)

H: Totally. Right angle, wrong angle. You know I wished, every now and then, I was just thinking, I wished he shared the same perspective and ability. But it literally took me years of hashing through certain aspects and perspectives that I felt that I had, to totally shake it up,

and Etch a Sketch, and brand new perspective. Boom. Go. Right? Every semester, every class, every book, every text book, every student, every presentation, every...every person breaking down into tears. It was really interesting.

S: Yeah. Mm. Yeah, no, that doesn't come up in trades. (laughs) Not that I've heard anyway.

H: Not unless you lose a finger. That's a whole new perspective.

S: No doubt. (laughs) Exactly.

H: (laughs)

S: Yeah, well, that's a good way to put it though. It has to change your perspective in that way.

H: And if it doesn't, you're really doing it wrong. They say you can't do it wrong. I mean if you walk away with the same mindset, and same thinking patterns, and the same perspective then you did it wrong. Or you were so damaged you have something else to chisel away.

After connecting with her father, and seeing and feeling the significance of the language when she started attending ceremony, Hailey became passionate about learning nsyilxcən and being able to teach it. In order to pursue this, she moved to Penticton to attend the En'owkin Centre, a small, Syilx-run school with passionate and influential teachers. After her first semester she took a break to attend a friend's language immersion house, where six women from very different backgrounds lived together speaking only nsyilxcən to one another every day for five months. She returned to the En'owkin Centre for a year before having to transfer to UBC Okanagan in order to complete her program. However, as the program at UBCO was not able to provide the courses needed, she was placed in the Aboriginal Access Studies program. As this program has a reduced course load compared to what she was used to, she filled her time with classes at En'owkin before transitioning to the Indigenous studies program.

She was understandably upset about the transition to the larger institution of UBCO, and had trouble connecting with other Indigenous students. She notes how the Aboriginal

Centre was a home base for her, and realized how her perspective was influenced by the fact that the school is in her home territory, which is not the case for each Indigenous student. The community at APS helped her gain compassion for those at different stages of their identity journey, although she admits she did not pursue many connections through that community. It was difficult for her to find connections as she is sober and many students are not, and many events centered around alcohol.

The Indigenous studies program was critical in her identity development, and she acknowledges that the program is not just about getting a degree, it is about growing from the experiences she had through the program. The research she had to do on herself in the program pushed her to dig to the roots of herself and her history, helping her to understand herself more. However, as transformation often is, it was also a very painful, traumatic experience especially since she was noticing mental health issues were surfacing in herself. The professors in the program were huge in shaping her experience at UBCO, and helped her change, shape, and validate her perspective as well as her identity.

Although she wishes her partner could share some of her perspective that she gained, she recognizes that gaining this perspective required her to do a lot of difficult work over a long time, so in order for that to happen for him, it would take time and support.

4.2.6 What is helping? – key supports in post-secondary

Damyn

D: And yeah, I think one of the major things as well is just the faculty. The Indigenous studies faculty is absolutely amazing. It started in my Indig 100 (editor's note: Indigenous Studies 100) class with Greg and he kinda opened my eyes. And then I took you know, classes with Marlowe [Sam], and I'm in a class with Margo [Tamez] right now. Just absolutely amazing people and they're people before educators, for me. I don't see them as professors I see them as, you know, everyday just amazing individuals. And, yeah just the, the experiences they've gone through, and the way that they've kind of shaped their own lives and for them to be teaching right now is just so amazing. It humbles me to be taught by these people because, yeah, it's just everything that they've experienced and their need to

educate. It's just yeah...it's amazing...I think having that support system around you, and you know these are my roommates now, and we've been going through the exact same stuff for the past three years...it kind of, it gives you that sense of belonging, and you do have that support system from right away. But it's kind of on you to make those friends. I know when I was coming from high school I was a nervous, awkward kid, and I didn't know how to make new friends 'cause I was just always hanging out with the same people, and I forced myself to. And I think it, it comes to that whether or not you're really in it. And I think if you are then you can, you can make those friends, make those connections, and then better yourself through your studies. So, but it really depends on the individual, I would say. But for me I would say, yeah, I wouldn't be here without the Access Studies program, so I think it was amazing...I think APS staff was huge. Your help was instrumental to my success, I would say, in my first and second year. And, I think, the Access studies is an amazing program. Like I heard that this year is the largest Access studies program.

(...)

D: (chuckles) This is a really funny one, actually. Smoking gazebos. 'Cause...I'm a smoker and I go to gazebos all the time, and when I'm smoking a cigarette I like to talk to people. And so, I've met people from all around the world, just at these gazebos. And just, having small conversations and then it will develop into these friendships. And it's just...again like going out of my comfort zone and just saying, hi, I'm Damyn...who are you? And I've actually developed a lot of close friendships out of that. And I think it's just, again, being able to communicate to your peers and then just find similarities within that...I've developed a pretty solid peer network just from smoking cigarettes, which is terrible, but...

For Damyn the Indigenous studies faculty were a huge support for him, and he cites Indigenous Studies 100 and its professor at the time as opening his eyes. He sees the professors as being "people before educators" who have grown as a result of their life experiences and share that knowledge with the students.

His roommates provided another community through their shared experiences of attending university and living together for three years. Although making friends is important for his support, he acknowledges that the process of doing so is different for each person as they have to work through their own fears and draw upon their own life lessons on their own.

The Aboriginal Access Studies program, and the staff at APS were critical in his success as well.

Interestingly, he identified smoking gazebos as part of his supports, as it provided a space to talk to people for short periods of time. Eventually these small chats turned into

friendships in some cases, allowing him to connect and build his community through shared experiences.

Violet

V: (pause) My family. My family...you know, people who I know just are holding good energy for me. Not even just my family, but people I've met or, people in my community who just know. You know they're praying for you. You know they deeply care about you and know you. So I think that's been unreal. Definitely my family. Having my band supporting me with finances. (laughs) Having a job, having different things throughout the week that you can look forward to. Whether it's...speaking with your friends here, or, yeah.

S: Yeah. Cool. So on-campus then, specifically what has supported you? While you're at school.

V: Kelly Fosbery. (laughs) The staff here...life-changing.

S: Right. Aw! That's so sweet. Kelly's the best.

V: Kelly is the best. Yeah...just shows you how leaders don't have always be so, aggressive or loud. They can just be, you know, more quiet and gentle and patient. So many of the way people are it's just, in that, already just holding that identity with not having to be better than anyone else. Just having to be yourself and knowing that, just people honour you for being like that, and I feel like a lot of the staff really have those qualities. Yeah, definitely Kelly Fosbery and Adrienne and...Yeah. Totally learned probably some of that from her 'cause I, I never thought I could really be a leader until she...you know someone believes in you? And I feel, really believed in for being here. And, even if I make mistakes I always have that net here, and I think that's really important. (tearful)

S: My goodness. Now I'm going to do it too. (laughs) That's awesome! That's huge.

V: I don't know where I would be.

S: Yeah! No, that's huge. (pause) Well that's, that's fantastic. (laughs) So here, obviously. And it...it sounds like you're saying you get to be you, right? And that's, and that's enough. Right?

V: Mhm...they're not political. But everyone around here, it comes with the territory, just being political people. And...even just the people that come through the Centre, and connecting with them, and just, you know, fight the power! (laughs) It's on Facebook. Some of us, you know, we see each other on campus and it's that quick nod, or...(laughs)...do just one of these, like have your fist up in the air. And it's just, yeah, having just that support. Just seeing people and knowing that you know it is possible to be here. I didn't really think it was possible to be here, or to be...yeah, I wasn't, I didn't have tutors growing up, I didn't have any of that. So to be even without that it's still possible. You know, it wasn't that long ago that we were forced into...as a people, residential schools and stuff, and now look at us.

We're right here with them. It's not, like, we're right here with them. I'm in a class and I'm right up there, being an Indigenous person. It's possible. Mhm. Totally stuff I've, I've thought about and considered. Like, *right* there. I don't know how to really explain that but...yeah.

S: I like that. Yeah. That's awesome. So outside of here specifically, do you feel like you can be yourself on campus? Can you be Native and feel supported wherever you go on campus?

V: (pause) Mmm. I feel like, yes and no. I feel like who I am as a person, who doesn't really care, and will walk with my jawline out, or just have my little chin forward, or you know...I'm not about to try to please anyone. I'm here for myself. So I think just with my little attitude I have sometimes (laughs), I'm here. Yeah, some people don't probably, don't overly want me to be here, but I'm still here. And I think, that's what I do for it. But...it had taken me a while to really...even with cultural stuff. To wear my moccasins if I feel like it, or to wear stuff that's a part of me...or even running for a campaign, and I'd wear my star blanket in my photos. It's a part of me. It might not be professional to them, but it's professional to me. I can be who I want because people who are going to stand by me get it, and will support me. So I think it's just about knowing who you are, and... of course people want that. A lot of non-Indigenous people, they don't have that. So, I just look angry sometimes. (laughs) (can't hear) But it's me. (laughs)

S: Okay...so, what do you think that, other than here specifically, what in this institution do they do well in terms of supporting you as an Indigenous person?

V: Mm, yeah, the staff here for sure...at the Aboriginal Programs and Services, the employees here, people who...like student-staff, right? Even though they try to micromanage (laughs)...

The ISA, the student initiatives...they do well...You don't find it with all faculties but I've, I've gone to, I've started to experience that nursing professors are the nicest people ever. And so supportive.

Violet beautifully acknowledges how her immediate family, as well as her community, are behind her, and their support is part of her success. Even though she jokes about it, having her band help her with her finances was very helpful as it allowed her to focus on her studies rather than making money.

Although she notes how the staff at APS are life-changing, she specifically cites one staff member as teaching her valuable lessons on what it means to be a leader, and what it means to have someone you love and respect believe in you. Kelly has shown her to accept her identity in a new way, allowing her to remain gentle, quiet, and patient. Kelly's

acceptance and support affirmed for Violet who she was inside, making space for her to do good work.

Having peers with similar stories, who understand and identify with her struggles and are also fighting for change and a better life, attend this institution affirms for Violet that it is possible for her to be here. Despite her many struggles and her belief that she would never attend post-secondary, she is able to attend and succeed in her studies. She notes how other students have similar stories, and how despite the traumas our people have faced, such as residential schools, we are still here. We are attending post-secondary alongside the non-Indigenous students, and we are moving through our traumas as a people, because students like Violet are here being brave.

While attending UBCO she has found supportive people, which allows her to practice what she feels is correct based on the teachings she has received. Although some people question this because it goes against the dominant culture's ways, Violet is still able to be herself.

In addition, Violet cites the Nursing faculty, student-staff, and student-led initiatives as being supports while attending post-secondary.

Sarah

S2: And how can I genuinely feel accepted without begging for approval? And APS did a really fantastic job of that for me. At one point, you know, hiring me on the team. And also, I remember when I lost my connection to that community, and I said to someone in the office, am I still allowed to come here? And they said, yeah! Of course! And I'm like, oh, okay. Because I felt like I only had a plus one card to get in here, you know what I mean? I just didn't know where I stood. But I had to ask, and then I got my answer, so... Definitely had like an identity shift. And the people that I used to hang out with at the university before that, I would not see them anymore. I would just hang out with my APS peeps. Where else would I go, you know?

S: Yeah. Totally. Okay, so what services, supports, or people supported your educational journey here?

S2: Okay, well, APS was great. My professors, especially the one that I first was like, hey, yo, can I get into your third-year class, and they're like, how is that possible? Can you tell me? But, I don't know. I think it's a whole system. Sometimes there are gatekeepers at the university, and they aren't necessarily Indigenous ones. But if I called to say, Enrollment Services and I said, hey, can I get into that course, they might say, mm, you don't have the required credits. Sorry, that's the answer. Versus, I don't know? Why don't you email the professor and see? Have a genuine conversation. I don't know. I think it's a...there were a lot of opportunities to get out into community from the university that actually were the links for me. Like getting to know the people at KFS, and going to the pow wows in Lake Country, or like little field trips that we would go to in the south. All that stuff. All that stuff. It can't be secularized for it to work. It has to be community-oriented. 'Cause I would...it would be the same thing, just token knowledge. If someone was like, this is how a salmon release works, isn't that cool? Take me there. So I can see it, and I hear it, and I can feel it. It's a different thing. That's when you really get to have conversations with other Indigenous students. And understand their struggles, and their successes, and their...and that we're really all not that different.

(...)

S2: No, I feel if anywhere UBC Okanagan's doing the best they can in an area that not a lot of people have experience in, and other places aren't doing at all probably. We can always improve. I've given some examples of improvement. I do think that there are, you know, in terms of like their HR power, people in the office, on the team, they keep people engaged, which is good.

Sarah was at a point in her identity journey where she didn't feel she was Indigenous enough to belong at APS. But that is the great thing about APS: everyone belongs there. Each student is honoured for where they are on their own journey. It is sad to me to think she felt she didn't belong, but I agree with what she is saying. She got her answer, which is great, but that also means there were cases where the answer was no. And what about students too afraid to even ask the question? Finding that she belonged caused a shift in her perception of herself, and the community and connection she felt was strong enough for APS to become the place she felt the most comfortable. She could be who she was.

Professors were also huge supports for Sarah, with most of them opening doors for her where the system of the university would have stopped her from moving forward.

The work APS does in connecting students with the local community is important, as it provides students with cultural experiences outside of the classroom, making the teachings

more understandable and meaningful. It also allowed Sarah to connect with other students and to see herself in them.

Hailey

H: Had I not been on the Aboriginal education list in high school I would have not have received tours of the university early on. So we went every year during high school. Grade ten, grade eleven, grade twelve. And I got to experience those tours, and at that point I'm like, well, I could do this. And I remember breaking off from the tour, and totally going on my own tour. (laughs) ...So the badass that I am, I always ended up in the fine arts building, and I remember being in somebody's...they must have, it was in one of the classrooms, but they painted the wall, they you know, whatever. And then I seen one room and it had already been painted white, and started, you know, it was put back, and the next room was somebody else's not yet. The other room had part of it painted. And I wondered how many layers. I was obsessed with the idea of, oh my god, I could do this. Or, oh my god, I could be part of something bigger. And so...I'd say in the second or third year of me being in university, 'cause I've been in university for too long. All these little breaks. (laughs) Babies happen. Yeah, poor planning on my part. That's a whole other thing. Allies. Having the concept of allies definitely kept me coming back. It wasn't that I felt connected to the school but it was the connections that I had through the school. I mean, sitting in the Aboriginal room in the APS centre, thinking this is a really stupid place to be, full of stupid people, trying to be part of this bigger picture, and they're all just little pieces in the machine. And I'm like, this is so dumb! I was sitting there, and I was grumpy, and I was waiting for my class, and I was like, should I even go to class? I remember sitting there, and Anne (*name changed) was walking in and she's talking, she was talking so loud. She always talks so loud. And she was stressing out and freaking out, and I'm like, man, who is this chick? God, she's annoying. And then I was listening to what she was saying and she was putting together an art show at Rotary Centre for Arts, and I'm like, oh, that's interesting. And...I remember looking at a poster earlier and it had a baby board on it, and I'd just learned how to make baby boards because one of the ladies at the house, from the Chopaka house, was expecting and I had to know how to make a baby board. And so I went and I learned how to make a baby board from somebody that I respected through longhouse and ceremony and that's how I had met her. And then going to class at En'owkin, there was a satellite class in Oliver and I went and stayed in Oliver with her and I got to know her really well and I learned how to make baby boards from her. And I made her a baby board. And then so I was at university and I was really looking at the baby board and I'm like, what's this about? Why did they choose that? And so Anne did her degree majoring in, her bachelor's degree in Fine Arts minoring in Indigenous studies. And she did a show, she curated a show and it had to do with inner child. And I had just been in one of Margo's classes being well, me-search. And so, I was like, hm, what are you doing? So I went up to Anne, I was on my way to class, and I just remember talking to her really quickly. I'm like, we need to talk. And she's like, what? I'm like, we're going to be really good friends, but I'm off to class. I'll see you around. And I just left it at that. And from there we've become really good friends. So I ended up putting a baby board into her show, and getting to know her and her family. And it allowed me to grasp a greater picture of community. So hearing about where people were coming from, literally. Well, how did you grow up? Oh, it was very similar. How was school for you? Hm, also similar.

(...)

H: Mm...I was really fortunate that my realm of studies was within the Indigenous studies department. I felt really safe in my classes. There was the occasional entry level class that have a lot more other students. And some of their perspectives, some of their arguments, some of their, even just what they said, all I hoped for was that I hoped that whatever I have to say changes that. In a lot of my classes that had nothing to do with Indigenous studies, it was like all of a sudden becoming the minority. And...I had never, I don't know it's weird, because the university, it's like, when you look at Kelowna (chuckles), and you grow up in Kelowna, it's really, really, really white. Or it used to be. The university was like the ultimate, whoa! There's Asian students, there's black students, there's...I had never seen some of these people before. And that sounds like so, lame. Right? Like, Gabe grew up in Vancouver. And I grew up here. (laughs) So he thinks it's really odd. I'm like, whoa, there's also black people now in Kelowna. And he's like, that sounds really racist.

S: But there wasn't before.

H: Fifteen years ago! We had two black kids at our school. My graduating class I think had one. Or two. You know, oh hey, how's Darren? Oh no, black Darren. That was a thing! (laughs)... (baby fusses) And so, the university opened up my eyes to, it was weird because, and growing up with a racist person in your immediate family was really strange too, 'cause I'm like, oh you can't say that and then in my head I'm like, that's what's real in your head. It's kind of like when you hear the word reconciliation what is the first inside tape in your head? Do you have words in your head and you have an instant tape? That plays as like a subtle voice? ...When I hear the word reconciliation all I can hear is, (whispers) what is that? What *is* that? You know, all those, it's my voice but it's something that is just ingrained in there now. (laughs)

Hailey begins by noting how her journey to post-secondary started in high school when she was able to participate in tours of UBC Okanagan in partnership with APS. While on these tours she learned what was possible for her, and she saw she could be a part of something bigger.

Although she was angry at first, and didn't feel connected to the university, she found connections *in* the university. These connections, such as the one she mentions, allowed her to embrace her culture in a different way in school, and she learned there are others with similar experiences to her own despite all the differences. Being able to have these connections supported Hailey while she was in school.

She also saw the Indigenous studies program as safe, noting how courses outside of that program were a much different experience. In those classes there were more non-Indigenous students, and Hailey often felt like an obvious minority navigating their perspectives and comments that didn't align with her own. She doesn't outright say they were saying bad or hurtful things, but she notes that she hopes what she said helped change their perspectives. I feel she is referring to the microaggressions that are often well-intentioned but informed by a very western-centric perspective of the world that positions Indigenous perspectives as the "other."

For much of her life growing up, Kelowna was "really, really, really white." She grew up accepting this as normal, which put her in an interesting place in her own identity given her heritage. When she came to post-secondary, which has a much more diverse population than the rest of Kelowna, she had to readjust her idea of normal because she was no longer the only person who was "different." And growing up in a family with a racist step-father her inner dialogue around topics like this is very complicated. I remember feeling this way when people in my family would say racist things. I would be upset by it and I knew it was wrong, but because I looked up to these people, there was a part of me that also believed those racist things, even (or especially?) when they were about me and my family. These things get ingrained in you because you trust those adults, and you see them as "normal," so you end up questioning yourself as well.

4.2.7 What needs to change?

Damyn

D: (laughs) It's kind of, a little bit of the opposite in terms of history. I think they tend to be...they uninspire me, I'd say, but which is inspiring within itself. I don't necessarily agree with some of the things they say, and also some of the course material. The things that they fixate on, it seems a little bit, I don't know...because, I think that every course that I take in

history, I think of the history majors, and this is kind of the only lens that they're seeing history - all of this (gestures with arms) - in. And so that kind of uninspires me a little bit because it's just like, wow these are, this is the next generation of people who are going to go on to maybe be social studies teachers or what have you...teach the next generation and this is what they're being taught, and this is the history that they're being told. And it just reinforces, kind of the assimilation process in my mind. But at the same time I write essays and I do all of my assignments to counter that. And I'll always put an Indigenous studies methodology or twist in my history papers because it's one in the same. Like Indigenous studies covers so many different courses and so I think it's so easy to look at it from that perspective and write it from there, which is empowering within itself so...I would like to see more resources dedicated towards Indigenous students prospering in post-secondary. Because I think it's, still our enrollment rates are not very proportional to our population. And I think UBC as a research institution could provide more resources to that, and could dedicate more time and energy towards that, and I think they should. Just kinda to speak more to that, I think having APS shoved in a back room on the second floor of UNC might not be a good start to saying that we have a reciprocal relationship. UBC, and Indigenous students, and the Syilx nation. But also, honouring that relationship is, is huge and I like that they do that with Elders coming in and...I think that there's room to improve, but I do like the way things are headed.

S: Yeah, well, that's positive. Nice. So, one of the things I see keep coming up in the research is, it's talking about how there's a need for Indigenous students to feel that they're like, they can see themselves reflected in the institution, no matter where they are. Do you feel like that's where UBC is headed? So that you could be anywhere on campus and feel like you belong there? Or, do you still feel like it's a grind?

D: Um, I feel like it's...it's kind of in the middle, I'm in the middle with that. It's hard to say that UBC is fully respecting its relationship with Indigenous peoples, and especially when they have, you know, the duke and duchess come, or you know, Justin Trudeau come. I think it's, it's interesting the ways in which the university kind of shows it but doesn't show it. So I think yeah, if there's more...I dunno, how could you put it in the spotlight that we love Indigenous people here? (laughs) Or we respect you? It's tough, it's a tough thing to do. But yeah, just to increase that sense of belonging, increase that inclusivity, creating more spaces would be huge, would be instrumental. And so, I think maybe we are still on that grind for proper and proportional representation on campus. But at the same time I think it's a lot better here than, like my friend's experience at Queens where he is one of, he was saying like twenty-five Indigenous people in a campus of twenty thousand. So they, you know, they have lots of work to do to reach that point where they are actually even honouring the land in which they inhabit...So I think it, it is better here, and the fact that there is a larger Indigenous population it definitely helps that, but again there is still a lot more room to grow. And, more spaces would be huge. Like, why is there only one Aboriginal Programs and Services? I think there should be maybe a couple sectors, or maybe a big sign saying, "Hey! It's this way! We're here! You have a place to go." That would be the best. Just to solidify that sense of belonging...I think it's...culture of the institution is the best way to put it. Just yesterday I was in this, I took this Indigenous femininity and sexuality course, and I noticed I was the

only man in the class. And I kinda think that's, it's super disheartening because there's so many more Indigenous issues, but I think it's all put on the list. And at the top is like, you know, land claims...and, you know, right to self-determination. And at the very bottom is...regarding Indigenous sexuality, femininity, masculinity, and how we've been impacted in our views towards it by colonization. But the huge thing for me was just that there's no other men in that class first off. And second off there wasn't that many Indigenous majors in that class. It was various different disciplines all pulled together. Gender and women studies, psychology, anthropology, and there was some Indig major and minors but we, we made up maybe less than a quarter of the class. So I think in ways, in terms of the way that it's structured and how we have pre-reqs and stuff like that, I think that should be one of those pre-reqs. But I think the whole joy of university is that you get to tailor your experience based on what you're interested in. But at the same time there's some stuff that should be necessary. And I think that's one of those things because, how are we going to fix the issue of murdered and missing Indigenous women if we're not being taught about the basics between why, Indigenous men, for example, commit so many abuses against Indigenous women...I think again we, everything has to fit within this box, and everything outside of that box is seemingly unnecessary. And I think by the institution creating that box it's kind of, inserts its own bias and says, this is important and this isn't... And so in that way, I remember last time we were talking about certain things that demoralize me, I guess, along my studies. And so for sure...even in being in Indig class and I learn so many amazing things within the class. Just seeing that lack of male participation, and Indigenous studies major participation, it's just super disheartening. But again, I think that falls within the confines of the structure of the institution. And the structure of our degrees. But, I think sometimes Indigenous studies doesn't fall within that scope.

S: Is there anything that you feel that takes away from feeling supported then, while you're here?

D: I think I could go back again to, you know how I'm taking a history minor, and jeez, this one history prof that I've had this term, he's said a lot of things that have kind of triggered me, I guess. And he, the last class he said something that had to do with misappropriation and how he's for misappropriation. And so there's that flip side where it's like...I want to alter my lens and not just take only Indigenous studies. I want to take history to try to shape my own bias. But at the same time like, the harm that comes within that. And I think the history faculty for sure perpetuates that. And I just get so demoralized thinking about what the next generation of history profs are going to be like, learning from these guys. And so, in that way I think - but don't get me wrong there's a lot of good professors within the history faculty - but it's those, those bad apples, or those older profs that come from different generations, different times. I think it's time to note them as obsolete and also their history. Because again, the prof develops their syllabus and their course based on their own bias, and so it's so harmful to be teaching those things to the next generation. And considering, especially putting history in a box and saying this is what history is and everything that falls without that, isn't history. 'Cause that systemically de-legitimizes Indigenous studies as a whole. So, yeah. (laughs) I think there's a lot of innovation that could be put into definitely that faculty

in particular. But...it's interesting too because I think of anthropology and how...detrimental it's been to Indigenous peoples throughout Canada, throughout North America. But every anthropology class I've gone into has incorporated Indigenous principles within it. And they're working towards reconciling that, and I think that's so huge. But I think it's now time for History to step it up, because just saying that some things are actually history, putting it within that scope, and by de-legitimizing so many other oral narratives by saying they're myths or legends - you know, all those different terms just to de-legitimize - it's so harmful. It's crazy. It's crazy to me that they can still be teaching, to be honest. (laughs)

S: But then you have Indigenous studies that's...I don't know, maybe it helps...balance it?

D: Mhm. It does. For sure. It definitely, it's more of that like knowledge, I would say. I'm super interested in it. But I'm also super interested in history. I can get so, oh man, read some of my history text books, I just can't stop. But yeah, I think it comes down to the way that it's taught. So that's why I'm a lot more drawn to Indig than I am history, but I can still find the like balance within the two.

The History program does not inspire Damyn the way Indigenous studies does. In fact, he notes it does the opposite as it reinforces the status quo in the education system by teaching future teachers one version of history. However, Indigenous studies has taught him a more holistic way of thinking that does not divide itself into separate disciplines, and he is able to take this thinking to his history courses which not only empowers him, but it also challenges the status quo.

He also cites the disproportionate representation of Indigenous peoples on campus compared to non-Indigenous peoples and the Indigenous population of Canada, and believes that as a research institution it is important to provide more resources towards Indigenous enrollment and success. Despite things like this, he does also like how the institution is working on honouring its relationship by having Elders coming to campus more often, but there is a lot more work to do.

On the one hand, the institution is trying to do better, and does things like the Access program and the Aboriginal Centre, but at the same time as Damyn notes, these resources are "shoved in a back room on the second floor of UNC" which may "not be a good start to

saying that we have a reciprocal relationship.” He also cites the duke and duchesses’ visit, and Justin Trudeau’s visit as going against their attempts to do better.

In order to do better, Damyn suggests finding ways to help Indigenous students feel a sense of belonging across campus, not just in the Aboriginal Centre. Creating more Indigenous spaces that are more integrated and obvious across campus would be a good start, although he notes UBCO is doing better than many other institutions.

On a deeper level, the culture of the institution needs to change as what the institution deems important and unimportant will influence the courses that are supported. Damyn notes that having the lack of male and Indigenous studies majors’ participation in the course he referred to shows the institutional bias. This culture can also be seen in the history professors who display a lack of understanding of Indigenous history which can be triggering for Indigenous students. Damyn has taken history in an attempt to expand his own perspective, but in doing this it means dealing with misinformed professors which can be harmful when you have to deal with it repeatedly. Faculty influence the future generations through their teachings, and their teachings are based on their own biases which are treated as “truth.” This unfortunately puts the Indigenous perspectives outside of what they refer to as “history.” This is harmful to Indigenous peoples. However, some faculties have worked to expand their perspective, such as the anthropology faculty who works towards reconciling their field’s errors of the past. Although learning multiple perspectives is valuable, how they are taught can make a difference. For Damyn Indigenous studies has helped him balance the teachings from other courses.

Violet

V: (pause) Mm. I think I’m always just, always try to look on the bright side of things. But I definitely...when stuff in the institution attacks...the community of Indigenous people, it’s an attack on you too. And just being a part of that. Like being really angry when...say for

example, the story poles...Or just...you know, the really quick territorial acknowledgement: oh, this is Okanagan territory. That's it.

S: Right. The story poles do you mean the ones over there when they did the...

V: The whole queen and king came on the day and I was like, are you joking? The first Syilx art piece installation, and they overtook it by that? ...So. That's an attack on...the Indigenous students that already are struggling to find a place, and we're struggling to find that art work that represented part of them. So that's always going to frustrate me. (laughs) The symbols of colonialism...(laughs) Right?

S: The two polar opposites of, you know, the royal people and our art. (laughs)

V: Right? And it's like a constant, or even with the student's association, how the ISA is trying to get an art mural in, and they said, okay don't make it too political...really? ...Why can't we...have our voice how we want to have our voice? So it's (laughs), it's constantly the attacks on you, as not even just everyday microaggressions and stuff, but, attacks on you, and your identity here. And community are a part of *here*. Yeah. So, constantly. But it's making, being able to make room for ourselves, or be able to call out people...(laughs) I've a really funny, bad story. So we were at this event...and my friend, she's Okanagan, and she stood up and just said, something really quick. I'll try to make this story really quick. And she was saying how you know, Muslim students are welcome on this campus, and just because there was that whole thing going on with how they were like, people were saying they didn't want them here, and she stood up and said, I really want you here and I think you're needed here and I, as this Okanagan person, really do welcome you from my own perspective, that's what she was saying. And then after that moment, later, Deborah Buszard said something and she was like, you know, we have students from all over the place and, long story short, she said oh, and *our* Indigenous students, and paused. And this is that whole idea of finding your words, right? My best friend she stands up, and she says we're not *your* Indigenous students! (laughs)...We're not *yours*. And then just sat back down and let the event be about, you know, what the event was supposed to be about. But she still, she couldn't let that one slide. (...)

V: So, *some* professors are really good, but there's been classes where there's such a cultural insensitivity...I've definitely gained my voice in just like, questioning stuff in a more kind way. It doesn't have to be...quote unquote, oh that's racist! But it can be in a more gentle way, and being like, oh what do you mean by that, or just that kind of idea to it. But yeah, it has happened and sometimes I'm talking to a prof afterwards about it or, yeah...Or even in textbooks I'm like, oh maybe we should...you required this reading but this reading says something insensitive, and maybe we should talk about that as a class. 'Cause that's...not right. So just trying to...do little changes where I can, at least.

(...)

S: (laughs) So what do you think that UBCO could do better then, to support Indigenous peoples?

V: Mm...I think the representation aspect is good. I also think Access Studies...they're doing a really good job with that...I think everyone should take Indigenous studies, but that's just me! (laughs) I definitely think...you know, I get it, professors, they're really busy. But even

one, just a cultural sensitivity pamphlet they have to read...a day lecture. Or something. Because when you *don't* have that, and you're constantly being in that way that Indigenous students...it hurts *so* hard because you're already hurt...I even think, staff here too, I don't feel overly supported by say the staff at Health and Wellness. And last year my brother died. And he passed away, and it was like, *the* hardest time of my life. And I felt like that support wasn't really there. And when I tried to go, it was treated as a transaction. Kind of that, I should be healed by this point. Or, oh, do you really need a schedule two weeks in advance for the next one? When it's like, my brother died. This is not something that should be just...thrown to the side. So I felt like there was no, not understanding as that...

S: Uchh, I'm sorry that happened to you.

V: ...I guess you can't really take Indigeneity aside, but I try to in those situations. It's not 'cause I'm Native, but just because it's the way they are or whatever...It's the same thing as putting a scale to being Native. It's that idea of, you have to like quantify stuff...or you have to be healed by this point. Uuum, no it's gonna take a while...I wish there was a process for it...But I think even from hearing it from my like peers and stuff, ideas of having a healing circle or doing these events that, you know, sometimes aren't student led. Students are already pretty busy. 'Cause a lot of the times stuff is supposed to be, or a lot of it is student led, and that's fine too, but sometimes it's nice to have, yeah...someone who knows, I don't know about a healing circle. Really, I can only know so much.

When the institution does something they see as normal or even beneficial, it can feel like an attack that hurts Indigenous students individually and as a community. When the duke and duchess came to UBCO, it coincided with the unveiling of the story poles, a Syilx installation that acts as a visual acknowledgement of the territory the campus is on. The British royalty overshadowed the story poles, its artist, and the Indigenous peoples who were looking for their place in the institution. For Violet it felt like an attack, given they represented the original colonizers.

She refers to the "everyday microaggressions" and the "attacks on you, and on your identity here," such as having our voices censored. She refers to it as a constant, and again stresses that Indigenous community is a part of the campus, so when something hurts a student it hurts the community as well.

However, Violet has been able to use the tools she has learned in post-secondary to make room for herself by using her voice in a way that is true to who she is to question

people on their behaviour or words. She mentions how even the textbooks can be insensitive, but she uses those instances as an opportunity to talk to the class and her professor about it.

She suggests that everyone should take Indigenous studies, and that professors and staff be required to do some work towards becoming more aware of Indigenous history because the weight of the trauma Indigenous students carry with them is already so heavy that misinformed attitudes from non-Indigenous peoples hurt even more.

To illustrate this point, she shared her experience with the staff in Health and Wellness (HW). When her brother died she reached out to HW she felt as though it was treated like a transaction and that there was an expectation she be healed in a certain amount of time. Unfortunately, this is very dismissive of Indigenous culture and family connections, as well as the grief process, and Violet left feeling very unsupported. She draws the connection to how western views want to quantify everything, assign timelines, and reinforce hierarchies, which does not align with Indigenous worldviews.

Finally, she notes that students need more programming support from the institution as they are already very busy and burdened, and sometimes do not have the knowledge they need to host certain events or connect to their culture and heritage.

Sara

S2: But I definitely, I've heard people talk about the dogwood program, the two different programs that you can have to graduate here, and that a lot of students in the south Okanagan don't get a true diploma because they want them to pass. They want them to get through so they can get a gas station job or whatever they want. And that's the goal. From the school district's perspective. But, I don't feel like there's a place for that, and I don't feel like there's a place for that in university either. I don't think we need to be holding people to a lesser standard just because they're Indigenous. They may need more support, but they should be expected to get to that same level at some rate. In terms of writing ability, organizational ability. We can't have people in masters' programs just because they're Indigenous, right? I want to see more people there. But they need to get there, and they probably need a little more help sometimes too, but don't let them be B class. Let them get to A class, because it's the only way they're going to be taken seriously in community. That's how I feel...And I get emails from people that I graduated with that are now master's students, and I'm like, I can't even read this stuff. And I'm going, 'kay, somebody's not helping them enough. And just

telling them, pat on the head, they're good enough. Because nobody, if they go get a job in community, they're not going to be taken as seriously as if they had those skills that they can develop.

S: So, then was there stuff, did you feel like in, while you were at post-secondary, either in undergrad or now, do you ever feel like you weren't supported on your journey, or even in your own, trying to find your identity?

S2: I mean, it's no fault of anyone's but my own. I'd say I would take that on personally. If I want to get in the club, or whatever you want to call it, I need to do the work to be in community. And I think I had enough people that I could talk to and ask, peers especially, that would say to me, just keep coming, just keep making those relationships happen. And...it isn't like checking off volunteer hours that's going to get you that respect. It's actually being a part of something, and caring about people, and checking in, and taking...we had chickens for a while, so I'd take eggs to a few different Elders that I know and love. And that part of it for me, that's the stuff of real life. And I think our generation comes with like this, there should be a manual to things. Just because I love it, everyone should let me. I don't know. You have to genuinely show up. There's no alternative to that. And I don't think anybody hindered me. But I definitely didn't get the easy way in. Which is fine. I don't expect any favours in this world.

(...)

S2: I'm just trying to think about your general question...Indigenous identity in post-secondary situations. No, things are good. I think it's coming, and I think my experience of the Indigenous professor is so interesting because they're all so different. Some of them are highly educated, community advocate types. You know who I'm talking about. And then you get the ones that are very quiet about their culture but they are very deeply steeped in how they view things. And some of them have no book knowledge at all and they're just like, hey, you know when I saw the deer up on the hill, and then they teach from that. I think that's incredible. But I wish that the student base would be gifted the perspective to respect those people, instead of being like, oh, this uneducated person is teaching my course. 'Cause sometimes that's the case. It's more of a learned perspective than it is...That's the way that it's been taught. But even the teachers that I have in the sciences, have very little life experience, very little practical experience. Mostly theory. So, how do we have balance? But I would love to see it be a requirement that all students take at least first year Indigenous studies. Because I have done, outside of the university, I have done some sensitivity, cultural sensitivity training for people that volunteer in the community with homeless folks, and the look on their faces – and these are medical students, social worker students, nursing students, primarily – and they're just bewildered by the story of the TRC. And all these things that once you know, how could you not know? How did this skip you completely? But even I, when I went to the TRC I was like, what is this? Where am I going? They need that exposure so that, number one that Indigenous communities are not like, how can you be so ignorant? And number two they can come from a different place, just in general life. So, that would be my vote. There's a more balanced perspective of what education is. A more Indigenized perspective.

Sara notes how sometimes the things put in place to help Indigenous students sometimes end up doing damage as well, such as pushing kids through school without helping them develop better academic skills such as writing and organization. This could lead to the students not being taken as seriously after they graduate and get jobs.

While reconnecting with her Indigenous identity she learned that identity is about bringing her whole self into what she is doing, and embodying the values as best she can. Although some people may wish for instant gratification, there is no way around actually doing the work.

She wishes all students had the opportunity to learn from teachers with different experiences and educational backgrounds in order to change the belief that there is only one way to be smart and educated. Sara also would like to see all students take first-year Indigenous studies to expand awareness of Indigenous history in order to avoid continuing to harm Indigenous communities with ignorance and create a “more balanced perspective of what education is. A more Indigenized perspective.”

Hailey

H: But yeah, places that I didn't feel safe...there's also different spaces that I didn't feel safe at the university, but they weren't specific to being Native. There were certain times of things, like during Idle No More where as an Indigenous person I did not feel safe. Generally. As an Indigenous, First Nations identifying female...there's always been that ...even just being a female in general in these times you just notice things. Being half, there's definitely times that I feel that within the university, within my community, and sometimes within my family. I've always felt it within my family. Either side.

(...)

(I asked if she has ever felt the institution (UBC) wasn't supporting her education or her Indigenous identity)

H: (chuckles) I feel that for the university being situated where it was, where it is, and that I identify as an Okanagan person, I feel that people before me have paved the way for that setting. And that hard stuff was already done.

(both laugh)

S: Yeah, no totally. This program didn't exist when I went to school. (chuckles) Yeah. Well, that's a good sign then. That like...

H: There's a shift...It's not a place of not knowing. Possibly a place of not understanding. And it definitely still feels like a check-box. We are on the unceded Syilx territory. Check. Here's a drum. Here's an Indian kid. Sing a song. Thanks. Bye. I got to witness...I do performances and whatever. I dance pow wow, partially because that was one of the only visible things growing up. All I wanted to do was be...(baby fusses) a part of...all I wanted to do was to know what it was like to dance. And to be part of. Not feel that separation. And so, that's one of the main reasons why I choose to dance...is I dance for that kid down the road who doesn't have access to it...but yearns for it. That's kind of where I'm at with my dancing part. I know the history of it. I know that it's really like adopted and shared, and here and there and everywhere, and the different tribes where some of the dances come from. And I don't know, I believe as long as you're respectful and understand that it's not traditionally Okanagan, but we share ceremony. Dancing is ceremony. And even if I do it as a performance it's...you'd never get to just dance for yourself. It's kind of like being a mom. You don't ever get to do anything for yourself. Ever! (laughs) (baby fusses) But like the performances and stuff, this last weekend I literally was on someone's list as a checkmark. It was...bittersweet. Canada Day weekend is such a weird weekend. I just did a performance...for a bunch of white people...I was entertainment.

S: That makes me think of, and not to be disrespectful of what they're doing, but...the Hawaiian people. When they have to do their luau for the tourists and stuff, right? Just popped into my head.

H: Or the Maori.

S: Yeah, exactly. And the Hakka.

H: And like there's-

S: Uh (chuckles), sorry Hailey. That's kinda gross!

H: Right? But, it's also a way to display culture. (baby fusses)
(...)

H: The story poles need to have a better write-up available.

S: Right. Yeah. Those poor story poles. Were you there when they first did the opening or anything?

H: No, but I know both of the artists really well. Well, not both of them. I guess Les and then his wife, I'm really tight with his wife. (chuckles) And so they were very side-struck that that was the whole prince thing. We live in an age with such technology that I think there should be a QR reader for every sign. Virtual tour. (chuckles) One of the worst things experienced in seeking help during my mental...fog, was when I finally did go for counselling. I remember you walked me up there. And I wouldn't have gone otherwise, and I appreciate that. I went to that counselling session. I don't know if I told you. She told me that I should go seek counselling elsewhere, because there was plenty of other students on campus that don't have access to outside counselling services such as the friendship centre.

S: Oh my goodness. Hailey.

H: (laughs) I never went back for counselling, and I never went and sought counselling elsewhere.

S: Oh, I'm so sorry, Hailey. That makes me so upset for you. Uch! And the fact that I walked you up there into that. Oh, I'm sorry.

H: I never blamed you, I just blamed the university. (laughs) I'm like, isn't this what tuition covers? (in higher toned voice) "So, I see that you're Aboriginal. Have you thought of accessing services elsewhere? We have a high volume of students that require counselling that are, that don't have access to such services." So that was special. And that was just before I was diagnosed. I had no idea what was going on in my world. And I don't see community in the friendship centre. I see community, yes, there is a community there, but I'm not part of it. Not my jam. At that point, and I had sought counselling out in community...and the counsellor they had here at the time was very old. I'm like, I'm really angry. I really want to smash people's faces, and she's like, I don't think you're angry I think you're hurt. And I'm like, okay. And I'm looking at her certifications and stuff on the wall and I'm like, I don't think you're qualified to tell me how I feel. Sorry. And then after when I was diagnosed and I was talking to my psychiatrist, he was like, you were manic. You were exploding at the time. You were like a bouncy ball inside of a small shoe box. You probably could have smashed somebody's face. And I'm like, thank you. (laughs) And part of my mania is I wouldn't have been able to accomplish all the things I did in such a short amount of time. Had I actually required sleep...(laughs) Silver lining! Double-edged sword. (laughs)

Hailey mentions feeling unsafe as an Indigenous person on campus during the events of Idle No More, and being a First Nations female she also does not feel safe. Also, as she is half Syilx she feels judgement from both her maternal and paternal family, as well as from the university and her community.

However, as the university is on her home territory, she has the privilege of following in the path her community has already created. As she said, "that hard stuff was already done." Things have begun to change where the institution knows about the issues, but does not understand them deeply or holistically. The land acknowledgements, drumming, and singing feel like check-boxes to be ticked; it's empty, and obviously so.

Growing up, Hailey saw dancing as an important connection to being Indigenous, although she was unable to participate until recently. Dancing is also ceremony, so she

dances for those who cannot because she knows what it is like to feel that way. She also acknowledges how ceremonies are sometimes shared between nations and connect them. Ceremony requires you give your whole self, yet you are always doing it for more than yourself. She uses the analogy of being a mother, where your every action is done with your children's well-being in mind. But when she was asked to dance for Canada Day, she was entertainment for a crowd who did not understand what her dance represented. On the other hand, it is valuable to be able to share some of our culture with others. This needs to be something the university considers when looking to hire people to perform.

As she knows the artist and his wife of the story poles on campus, and would like them to have a better write-up available. Although she wasn't at the event where they were unveiled, she knew the artist and his wife were upset that the event coincided with "the whole prince thing." To me this serves as a reminder that what the university does impacts the community as well. She also would like to see information available throughout campus so it is visible and accessible, such as having QR codes for the street signs and virtual tours.

One of the worst experiences she had on campus coincided with a time where she was struggling with her mental health. I remember she came to my office and needed help, so I convinced her to go to Health and Wellness to talk to someone. I could see she was struggling, and I did not have the tools to help her. Although she did see a counsellor, she was told to try and find services at the friendship centre as she is Aboriginal, and HW is very busy. Not surprisingly she did not return to counselling, although later saw a doctor who diagnosed her with a mental illness. The counsellor may not have been trying to be hurtful, but it was nonetheless. It was dismissive of Hailey's need for help, and showed a lack of awareness of Indigenous community. Just because she identifies as Indigenous doesn't mean

she is connected in the way the counsellor imagined. Hailey needed to be listened to, and no one did until she saw the doctor.

4.3 The Talking Circle

The talking circle took place long after the individual interviews, so each of the participants had changed and so their perspectives had grown as well. Although I felt badly about this gap in time, it turned out to be a blessing as it helped shape the research further. However, including it here proved to be difficult as I was unsure what the best way would be for me to present it. It did not follow the same format as the individual interviews, so I could not organize the themes in the same way.

While working through the transcription, I highlighted sections of text that covered a specific idea or theme, writing my comments and thoughts related to that section. I then prayed, asking for help and guidance before going through the transcription again, along with my comments, and wrote...what you will see is a fusion of the words of the students and my own.

The four of us met in the Aboriginal Centre on a Saturday. Hailey brought her youngest son, and Violet brought a friend who studied at a nearby table while we chatted. I was so nervous as I wasn't sure what to expect. I suddenly felt unprepared and unsure of my work, but Hailey, Violet, and Sarah were very supportive and open. After introductions I provided an overview of my research to-date to refresh everyone's memory, and to show them the direction I was headed with my thinking based on the research and interviews. Then we jumped into the discussion, which just flowed from topic to topic. We allowed each other to speak without interruption, except for the occasional signals of agreement.

4.3.1 Summary

Sarah noted how it is unlikely the dominant society is going to tear down, or even modify what they have built, so we will have to find ways to deal with that. Indigenous peoples historically have had to be the bigger person and adapt to the ways of the dominant society, but how can we live for ourselves and not for anyone else? I agree that we must shift our focus inward, so we can heal ourselves and our communities, rather than worrying about what anyone else is doing for us. However, I feel we cannot ignore the problems colonialism has brought and continue to bring, so there must be a balance in our approach to this.

Hailey referred to Indigenous peoples like water because we can flow and adapt to our environment. Changing the external environment in a superficial way in order to appease Indigenous peoples is not enough. The issue is much bigger than that, as the campus is not inclusive of many people, so we must consider *all* of the people who are here. Like water, we can also make our own path.

To prepare for university, Hailey suggested students have the opportunity to deal with some of their traumas first. Although programs like the Aboriginal Access Program are excellent at bridging students to degree programs, they do not help students deal with the deeper issues that may hold them back in post-secondary. These issues will be exacerbated in a colonial institution. Hailey also talks about how different generations operate differently based on their experiences with colonialism. The older generation had to do the hard work of falling in line and dancing the colonial dance in order to get by. Head down, get to work. Then the next generation went to school and wanted to bring it back to the people, but school changed them and through a western education taught them colonial thinking, making it difficult to go back to community. So how do we peel back the layers of colonialism? These

dynamics cause community to struggle with being a community, which also lacks on campus. For Hailey community is where everyone supports one-another until everyone healed.

Sarah noted how coming to university is hard enough, never mind when you have to deal with racism. The individual has to do the work to find the tools that will support them on their journey, but having support and guidance is also important. There are resources available that teach us how to do better work in community, but translating that information into practice is not easy. She expressed not knowing if she is doing things correctly, which I often ask myself. We have to trust that we have received the teachings we need, which I can say as I have the benefit of my mother's teachings. Perhaps there could be more opportunity for students to learn from Elders and mentors from the community in order to gain the confidence to do the work. We will make mistakes, but if we can own up to them and learn from them with guidance, our work will continually improve.

For Violet, having mentors as a direct, one-on-one support made a huge difference in her experience, as they understand her story, which honours her story and validates her feelings. She points out the struggle with colonialism often connects us across territories, as our stories have similarities we can relate to. Importantly, there is some institutional support to build connections between students, making it possible for more students to access. I see this as an area to expand on as the mentors, hosts, and APS staff are critical, but not all Indigenous students access these resources for various reasons. Perhaps expanding funding to find ways to connect Indigenous students together with Indigenous mentors and guides will help all involved. Violet also notes how being able to have the opportunity to come to university, and having your best chance because of the supports and programs offered, whether or not post-secondary is for you in the end is important. Perhaps our ancestors have a

reason for you being there, for leaving, or for going on to graduate. But at least you had the opportunity either way.

Sarah, who does not have a deep connection to her culture, history, or community, feels having people like the staff of APS hold space for her to join in and make mistakes was important, as “community is really key, because we’ll all take those behaviours and be better for each other outside of these walls.” This also answers her own question earlier of “how will I know when I am doing it right?” Having those community experiences while in school helps prepare students for this. They can begin to understand the rhythm and desires of the peoples this way, before they graduate and find jobs working in or with community.

Holding space for people to learn is what the staff of APS do. I love how Violet says the Aboriginal Centre is specifically welcoming to Indigenous peoples, but it is welcoming to everyone. The staff and the environment allows people to be where they are at, and to find support should they be ready for it and want it, whether or not they are Indigenous. Being non-Indigenous comes with its own struggles, especially in relationship to the history and present with Indigenous peoples, so it is important to be gentle with education, and to be open to their mistakes and who they are. It cannot only be Indigenous peoples doing this work and support though; we must find ways to grow it so the amount of safe and collaborative spaces can increase.

Hailey reminded us how sometimes we can be fierce and sometimes we can be gentle. It is okay to be gentle at times, but other times we need to be more than that. She also reminded us that community is more than just where you live; it can extend and grow through things like school, tournaments, and pow wows so there is always somewhere to go. These interconnections help students with their traumas and difficulties, and then the energy can be released through ceremony. This support and release is important, because for Hailey

she must prepare herself to come to school. She likens it to knowing she is going to get sick physically, and “I know that I’m mentally going to be ripped apart. I know that I’m spiritually going to be stripped and just wrung out because this space requires you, it mandates you to share as much as you can because you’re that token.” The university doesn’t look at students as individuals with lives. For Indigenous students we are always seen as simply that. We are expected to “plug into their wants and their needs, otherwise it’s not going to be as easy for you to move through here.” Saying no is often very difficult. This hit me, as it reminded me of codependency and abuse. Codependency means being vigilant about how the other person is feeling, and how they are making us feel. Our focus is always external, and we believe we are responsible for the emotions of others, so we betray ourselves and people-please. But this is draining and depressing as we no longer pay attention to our own needs. I know this isn’t a perfect metaphor, but in some ways colonization has forced us into an abusive, codependent relationship with the colonizer. So we say yes to things because we want to please them or keep the peace, and to teach and share where we are able. Yet are they asking everyone to perform and give of themselves? For Hailey it is difficult because she is from the host nation, and is expected to perform even more. Many Indigenous students don’t want to identify as such, as they do not see there is a benefit to do so.

As it is a colonial institution, the perspective of the university is written into its policy. I agree, most people within the institution will be unable to see the need to change unless it impacts their life directly in some way.

The university assumes all people are the same when they come, and they don’t account for different ages, life experiences, and so forth.

As someone who is “standing in the middle,” As someone who is not obviously visibly Indigenous, Sarah feels she is in a unique position to work with non-Indigenous faculty and peers. Despite her family not wanting to identify as having Indigenous heritage, she welcomes the challenge that comes with identifying as Métis and being in the middle as it is a place to help with the change. Sarah identifies Métis people as specifically able to fill this role “because we stand in the middle so often,” and because she does not look visibly Indigenous, non-Indigenous people will often assume she is non-Indigenous too. This gives her a unique opportunity to offer a new perspective to her peers as a result. I understand what she means, as Métis people often must walk between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds depending on their history. However, as someone who also has mixed heritage but is not Métis, and as someone who has struggled to find a place between or within the Indigenous and non-Indigenous world, I think there is room for more than Métis people to stand in the middle. Given the ranges of experiences and perspectives Indigenous peoples have, there is room for us all to have a role on this healing journey based on where we each stand and what we know.

Violet highlighted this point by sharing how when faced with a microaggression in the classroom, such as a professor showing students statistics about Indigenous peoples without knowing or teaching anything about the context, she is able to gently ask the professor for clarification or offer another perspective. She believes she could do this with or without her cultural background, and reminded us of how Indigenous peoples have worked hard and are able to do many things we could not have done generations ago. We are in the classroom, getting good grades, and holding space for Indigenous perspectives. Violet notes how the nursing program itself is empathetic, which allows for professors to be empathetic and supportive. This is so important for Indigenous students and their healing. Violet gave an

example of a professor who heard her Indigenous perspective, validated it and encourage it, and offered support. She is okay with sharing her story and struggles with the class in order to provide them with context and awareness. Being in university has also helped her find the words to be able to do this effectively, and to know what she is saying.

Hailey reminded us of how important words are, and how in order to effectively share we must be able to translate our thoughts into something the listener is familiar with, so they can better understand it. She noted that although I am by no means a weaver, it is still a part of who I am and am familiar with it. By using this weaving process framework I can understand the research better, as the weaving process was a way to transmit knowledge, similar to the process of painting or creating art. Hailey suggests professors could learn different ways to transmit knowledge to their students, and students could see how there are many ways to transmit knowledge effectively so learning to see through many lenses and hear various perspectives will help students better understand a topic.

Over the last few years Hailey has noticed how Indigenous peoples tend to deny and hide our trauma from ourselves and each other, which I think is connected to the shame we feel. Hailey wonders how much can we help others until each of us is healed of our own trauma. I understand why she says this, as I have seen our traumatized people trying to help, but they cannot because they haven't healed enough from their own trauma, internalized colonialism, and racism. They cannot see beyond their own pain, ironically because they are often denying it at the same time.

The university is a bit like an arm of the community because there are many people from there on campus in various capacities. But while at school, Indigenous people must separate themselves from their heart and spirit to do the work, making it hard to stay whole even when we return home. She is referring to the Syilx belief that we can leave our spirits

places as a result of having to do these things, and we need to learn to call it back. It would be even better if we didn't have to separate ourselves in the first place. This separation or disconnection from the whole self makes it difficult to function while in school, and when we return to work in our communities that imbalance continues. Although my mental health is not the same as Hailey's, I understand what she is saying as it is hard to be at school when I am not feeling mentally strong, or when I am asked to separate myself in order to be taken seriously. And although things are changing, the perception of mental health is very western on campus, so reaching out for support often means being given a western prescription for treatment. Just do X and you will be okay. But this ignores so many of the reasons for the state of our mental health.

Sarah extends the thinking around our people having difficulty when returning to work in our communities, noting how the lateral violence that happens in the institution is part of the reason why students don't see good modelling of leadership, making it hard to be leaders themselves. She suggests having both an entrance and an exit strategy for students, as practical skills are not necessarily developed in university, so they may have a lot more knowledge after graduation, but have limited capacity to know what to do with it and how to do it in a good way. As professors do not necessarily have to have a background in education, some professors are just passing information along to their students. Sarah has seen how community organizations attempt to work in a good way, but no one is able to be vulnerable and leave their egos at the door. I feel this is part of what Hailey was referring to earlier where many of us learned a very colonial way of doing business in order to survive. We are taught vulnerability is not safe or professional, often making the work environment toxic.

Hailey remarked on the need to break down our internal stigmas and traumas in order to rewire our brains and help deal with some of our mental health issues. Many of us go to

treatment to deal with the symptoms such as drug and/or alcohol abuse, but the underlying issue of why we choose to abuse is often left unresolved. She sees the drug problem as coming from all of the underlying, unresolved trauma in our hearts, spirits, bodies, and minds. This reminds me of the work of Dr. Gabor Mate (2009). He drew a connection between substance abuse and/or illness with our unresolved traumas. For Hailey, traditional knowledge can be used to help fill the voids and gaps in our healing, because when we are balanced we can walk between the worlds easier. If we are not balanced we will “knock things over, and be knocked over.” Although some of our big traumas are beginning to be addressed, some of our traumas get less attention, like the kind felt by those who did not go to residential school but dealt with losing their cousins and peers to them. As she says, these people fall through the cracks because they don’t fit a particular stereotype held by the dominant society, so they turn to addictions, or push themselves through school to survive even if it isn’t a fit for them. Many of us get caught up in survival mode, and Hailey wonders if she will ever get out of that state. I like to believe we can, although maybe we cannot fully shed it but rather learn to deal with it, like some of us learn to deal with anxiety and depression. But we must find a way to communicate and relate between generations, including those that get forgotten as we cannot leave anyone out of the conversation. Then we can work together to support one another and work towards a common goal.

Sarah sees a generation of students trying to better themselves through a colonial education, but it is often a difficult journey that “takes a lot of heart,” which we have always had, but many of us are just now rediscovering it. Because our relatives often haven’t been able to show us how due to their own traumas, we are relearning what it means to be strong. We need to find what makes us passionate so we have the reason to push through the hard times. I would add we also must deal with our traumas as Hailey noted, and work towards

decolonizing ourselves and re-Indigenizing when possible. Given that most professors will not make changes unless policy dictates they do so, perhaps this research project can help further the conversation that will help us work towards policy changes. Hailey cautions how people tend to fight, flight, or freeze when their livelihoods are threatened, so perhaps we need to consider how professors may react to policy changes. How do we deal with these various responses? For Sarah, she feels the people impacted by the changes most need to be involved, such as Indigenous students rather than people in positions of power within the university.

Becoming a mother changes your heart and focus, as Hailey notes, so we need to consider what that could look like throughout the generations. Those of us with heavy trauma may be unable to see it while we are younger. Having children starts to change you, and if you are lucky to get this kind of clarity, you desire to do and be better for your children so you don't pass along the trauma any further. Hailey found a style of yoga that helps her release the trauma stored in her body, much of which is in her hips. She notes how many Indigenous peoples carry trauma in their hips, and beginning to release it brought her to tears in her first class. I have heard from my mother that women often carry a lot of energy in their hips, and it gets trapped there making us sore. This energy or trauma can be almost anything, even becoming a mother. This release of energy can be very intense, especially if you have never had the chance to learn about your emotions growing up. You may not recognize what is happening or what the feelings are because they have been stored for so long they feel normal. If the buildup has been happening for a long time it can be stored in several areas of the body, making the release more difficult. If someone is helping you work through this your energy can pass to them, making it important for them to know how to release it

themselves. This is very difficult work, but it points to how we need to work together, and we need to blend the spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical to do it.

Violet noticed she stopped grinding her teeth after practicing yoga, but as our paths are all different Hailey has not yet found that healing through it. We are taught to spend most of our time in our heads and at work or school, leaving our bodies to try and deal with the emotional and spiritual aspects of our lives. Unfortunately, this usually means we do not deal with those issues but rather push them down so we can continue to go to work or school, and they then show up in our bodies. Hailey feels if someone is willing to commit to the work of dealing with their trauma and being successful in school or life, they will be able to see if that path is the right

4.4 Summary

This chapter has presented the perspectives on Indigenous identity of four Indigenous students at different points of their lives and educational journey. Using my x^wməθk^wəyəm spindle whorl framework and weaving methodology allowed me to see the stories of the students in multiple ways. Not only did this approach allow me to see the stories individually, it allowed me to see all four of them as a whole, in relation to my own story and to the broader context of our shared histories in this country. Incorporating the talking circle allowed me to see the growth and change in each of our perspectives. Each of us saw ourselves a little differently, allowing for a more complete perspective of ourselves and our families, the institution, and the nation.

Many of the themes from Chapter Three can be seen in the words of the students. The fallout from our history of colonialism can be seen in how each of us and our families struggled with our identities throughout our lifetimes. Most of us grew up knowing we were different, although we may not have understood why. We saw the differences throughout our

journey through elementary and high school, but it wasn't until coming to post-secondary where we were given the opportunity to explore this through Indigenous studies and the support of APS that we were able to look at ourselves and our families differently. Although there are many things that need to be changed in order to better support Indigenous peoples' identity in post-secondary, having the Indigenous studies faculty and courses, as well as other Indigenous students and support staff has given Indigenous students the space to begin the healing process so they may become whole people again.

Chapter Five: Giving Away the Blanket

5.1 Giving away the blanket

There are many reasons to create a weaving. Sometimes they are meant to keep in the family, but often they are meant to give away in ceremony or celebration. Giving a blanket away represents the sharing of all of the experiences and energy associated with that weaving: the gathering, the storytelling, the love, the connection. Rather than hoarding that energy for the benefit of an individual, it is shared freely. In this case, the weaving is meant to give away, for true wealth is measured by what you share with others.

I have always been fascinated with stories, convinced there was deeper meaning intended just for me contained within the words. All I had to do was read or listen and I felt myself detach from my body, absorbing the knowledge with relish. I have wanted to write for almost as long as I have loved to read, but my fear of putting such a huge part of myself out into the public domain terrified me. It opened me up for criticism and judgement. It was like sharing a vulnerability with a new lover and having it cast back in your face. I didn't believe I had anything worth sharing with anyone. But slowly over the course of this program I have come to realize that people are listening to me and my words, and they are received with warmth. But as we all have our own truths, not everyone is going to agree with what I am saying here. That doesn't mean my truth is any less valid or real though, as I can only speak from my own situation. And speaking from this situation, I feel there is value in sharing this weaving so it may provide warmth and good energy to others who need it.

5.2 My intentions and hopes

Outside of submitting this work as part of my program requirements, I intend to share this with the students I interviewed, other students who are interested, Aboriginal Programs

and Services, and the wider UBC Okanagan community as appropriate. It is my hope that by sharing the stories of the students together with my own story and the research in this way, I can offer a holistic perspective on Indigenous identity and its relationship to post-secondary institutions. If non-Indigenous peoples are able to understand our stories in a deeper way, in both a micro and macro level, perhaps they can make connections in their own lives and make changes.

5.3 Themes and Discussion

Although we are all from very different territories, come from different nations, lived in different communities, and have very different families, I was struck by the similarities that ran throughout our stories. We spoke of these things in different ways as we have different views on them of course, but the connections interested me. Despite the experiences being as numerous as the peoples having them, the challenge of growing up Indigenous in a colonial system has impacted our lives in similar ways.

It was difficult to group the themes as they are, not surprisingly, interconnected. The themes seemed to flow into one another, with each leading to the other. So although I have grouped them to call attention to the particular elements of that theme, it is important to remember that elements of each are woven throughout. By presenting them in this way, I hope to avoid recolonizing the stories of the students and encouraging a holistic perspective. I will then conclude with recommendations to the university.

5.3.1 The Indigenous Experience

Damyn lived off-reserve in an urban setting in the Lower Mainland of BC, is non-Status, of mixed heritage, and his cultural experiences happened through his participation in the Aboriginal education program in school. Violet lived on-reserve in a rural setting in northern Saskatchewan, is Status, is from North Spirit Lake First Nation, Lac La Ronge

Indian Band, and Lac Seul First Nation, and grew up having her family and community guide her cultural experiences. Sarah lived in a rural setting in Saskatchewan, is Status Métis, of mixed heritage, and had no cultural experiences to speak of until university. Hailey lived off-reserve (but now is on-reserve) in an urban setting in the Interior of BC, was non-Status until meeting her father, of mixed heritage, and until meeting her father in Grade 12 her cultural experiences were through her participation in the Aboriginal education program. I grew up off-reserve in an urban setting in the Interior of BC, was until fairly recently non-Status, of mixed heritage, and had limited cultural experiences through my mother and working in Aboriginal organizations. We all come from different nations and have varying levels of community connection, yet these differences are also very Indigenous.

As Lawrence (2004) notes, the Indian Act has organized the lives of Indigenous peoples in ways that have become normalized, and it has shaped how we think of identity. She feels the silence about heritage learned in residential school, lost ties to community, and invented categories of identity has left many of us hurt deeply. The intention was to have us assimilate, and the ongoing attempts to do so have resulted in the situations we see today.

Colonialism has led to much of our lived realities. Each of us referred to the deep shame our family members feel about Indigeneity. For Hailey her non-Indigenous mother and step-father tried to hide her identity for as long as possible from her. When they could no longer do that they attempted to downplay or dismiss it and its value. Sarah's entire family was in denial about their identity, never speaking of it and refusing to talk about it. Violet's father was taught to be ashamed of being Indigenous in residential school, so he downplays his identity. Damyn's non-Indigenous father downplayed his identity, trying to get Damyn to fit in. My father did the same. This is colonialism at work. It has programmed our families to believe in the western worldview as the ultimate truth and to continue the cycle by getting us

to colonize one another (Battiste, 2000; Lawrence, 2004). In elementary and high school, we learned very little about our peoples, with the western ways of knowing framed as the ultimate truth.

Colonialism, and its offspring the Indian Act, have led to Indigenous peoples' identity being fractured and in some cases, confused or even lost. Although colonialism and its results have influenced our lives differently, our stories are related and Indigenous. This Act is designed specifically for Indigenous peoples, and it has touched and shaped our lives in almost all facets. Non-Indigenous, and as the students and I discovered through the Indigenous studies courses, Indigenous peoples are often unaware of how our lives are influenced by the Indian Act, seeing only the stereotypes that are the symptoms of the real cause of our illness, colonialism. So despite our cultural and historical knowledge being varied, our stories similar and are all uniquely Indigenous. Our stories show the many ways colonialism has influenced the Indigenous experience, and by coming to post-secondary we have the opportunity to reshape that influence.

5.3.2 Trauma

Connected to the Indigenous experience is trauma. Although I feel most human beings have experienced some form of trauma in their lives, there is a very specific form of trauma unique to Indigenous peoples in this country, and it plays out through generations. There is a wide range in what this trauma can look like, and we are all at different stages of our healing journey.

For Damyn, having his father and father's family repeatedly devalue his Indigeneity, having his peers at school demand he prove his identity to them, and being constantly reminded of his differences led to a lot of internal confusion and shame. He eventually refused to share about himself until he knew he could trust the person in order to avoid

dealing with these microaggressions, much as the defense mechanism many Indigenous peoples employ as Lawrence (2013) described. Until he was able to accept who he is, making friends was difficult. Violet's father was dealing with the trauma of residential schools, having been taught to be ashamed of his Indigeneity, and to deal with emotions with abusive behaviour. This trauma was passed down to his children, as growing up in a house with someone who has been taught to abuse and to hate themselves typically keeps the cycle going, leading to intergenerational trauma (Atkinson, 2013; Kaufman, 1996; Wolynn, 2016). Sarah's family attempted to blend into the dominant society, denying any Indigenous heritage because of their internalized shame, colonization, and racism. Hailey's non-Indigenous family also hid, denied, and devalued her Indigeneity and refused to let her know who her First Nations father was for the first several years of her life. When she did learn who he was she was not allowed to contact him.

Each student had their identity denied in some way, by family members as well as by their peers. Having someone you love deny or devalue your identity, tell you that you to hide who you are, or that your people are a stereotype is traumatic. As children we take those messages to heart. I have a clear memory when I was 13 or 14 of watching a Vancouver news program with my friends, and there were First Nations drummers and singers as part of the story. I was excited to listen as I almost never had the chance to hear drumming. However, my grandmother came into the room, made a noise of disgust, and told me to change the channel because that was just noise and not real music. I remember feeling a flush of shame as I realized how much she hated my people. Did she hate me too?

Professors, teachers, and peers often say racist, hurtful things out of a lack of awareness and understanding, but they hurt deeply as we are already hurt. Often we have been hearing these kinds of statements our whole lives at home in our families, on TV, in

books, in movies, and in the news. There are constant messages to remind us of our Otherness, and for those of us who are still deep in our hurt, these reminders can compound our pain and push our healing further out of our reach. As Kaufman (1986) noted, shame can warp our views of ourselves and the world, and lead us to avoid certain situations that could be shaming. We may try to blend in to avoid being singled out (Lawrence, 2013), but denying who we are can cause a wound in our spirit. However, when we are able to accept and embrace our identity completely, we can work through those past trauma wounds and heal them. Additionally, there is the intergenerational trauma many of us carry. The trauma and pain our ancestors felt watching their land shrink, their people being pushed to the margins of society, and their children stolen doesn't go away. As noted above, this trauma and pain is passed down and is woven with the experiences of each subsequent generation.

What can the institution do to support Indigenous students (and staff and faculty, for that matter) given this? I believe we must critically look at the institution and consider how our actions and decisions impact Indigenous peoples, given our shared history and present. I also feel this is a call for each person in the institution to examine their own internal biases and beliefs, and question how that impacts their words and actions every day.

5.3.3 The Geographical Cure

One theme that surprised me is what Sarah called “the geographical cure.” Each of the students referred to the need to get out of their home situation as soon as they were able to. For Hailey it meant leaving home at a young age to get away from her family. Damyn, Sarah, and Violet moved further away from home to attend university. Violet specifically cited coming two provinces away from home was important in order to avoid distractions. She had seen others try to go back to school but nearby relatives made it hard to focus on their studies, so she wanted to avoid that.

Institutions must consider this desire to relocate, as there are deep reasons for choosing to do so. Often it is a desire to escape our situation and create something better on our own, but what we have left can still be hurting us if it has been happening for a long time. Coming to a new territory with a different culture can be jarring, especially for students coming from more rural areas with higher Indigenous populations. Aboriginal Programs and Services already does a lot of work to help Indigenous students get settled in their new town and campus. They host an Aboriginal Student Orientation at the start of the academic year, pair first-year students with mentors, provide tutoring and academic advising, and offer cultural supports such as community outings and visits with Elders. However, they cannot control what happens when students interact with other staff such as those in Housing and Health and Wellness, or with faculty and students. All departments must examine how they work with Indigenous students, and consider that some of them have left difficult situations.

5.3.4 Colonialism

Given how the Canadian education system is built on a colonial foundation, it was not surprising to see colonialism harming the students throughout elementary, high school, and post-secondary.

Schools have a habit of keeping the separation between the dominant society and the Other visible. The programming is not integrated, but wedged into the colonial school system, making the separation clear. Damyn disliked being pulled out of class for programming, as it labelled him as the Native kid. So he chose to try and hide his identity while in elementary and high school, disliking his otherness highlighted especially because it seemed to give his peers permission to ask him to quantify his Indianness for them, based on their colonial understanding of what that should look like. Sarah saw how the system punished Indigenous students for their trauma, and saw how the system and its policies can

prevent students from moving forward. Although these policies are meant to streamline things and keep order and fairness, who do they do this for? As Battiste (2000) notes, they are meant to maintain the status quo.

What UBCO chooses to support and not support reveals the culture of the institution and its biases. For example, Damyn saw how some of the history faculty reinforced the status quo by teaching students only the colonial version of history. Course materials often contain offensive, inaccurate, and/or triggering content for Indigenous students, and professors are often unaware of this. Some also do not see where the offense is, believing their perception of the world to be accurate and true. This belief sometimes leads to professors, students, and staff stereotyping or saying hurtful things, without having an awareness that it is so. As Violet mentioned, these things hurt so much more because we are already hurt.

Institutional policies that ground and govern the university's day-to-day activities (and other institutions for that matter) are written from a colonial perspective on the world that fails to consider other ways of being as valid. Professors have little incentive to release their hurtful practices as the institution is still founded in biased policy.

Additionally, Indigenous peoples face daily reminders of their place in dominant society. It isn't just on campus while we navigate the system there, it is everywhere we go in our lives. Hailey shared how she was asked to dance for a Canada Day celebration, and although she believes there is value in sharing her culture with others, those events strip the spirit out of her work. The audience sees the surface, a First Nations woman dancing, not the whole. They don't see her spirit and heart she puts into her dance, how it is a ceremony, and a way to communicate and connect with the universe. She notes how she had to put aside her spirituality growing up because she was taught to think it was crazy. The violence from colonialism comes in many forms. It can come externally, from simply being looked at

differently by non-Indigenous people, to being yelled at during Indigenous rights events such as Idle No More. People do not want to hear our voices, so we are told to be quiet, or we are called mean names like “squaw” in an effort to belittle and silence us. It is hard to feel safe anywhere. But the very difficult thing is the violence has been taught to our people since contact, so we can continue it ourselves. Our people have been taught to judge one another, with lateral violence becoming a way to police and colonize each other. This fear-based way of being was adopted by many of us in an effort to survive and fit in.

The Indigenous students I spoke with shared how the Indigenous studies courses and faculty, as well as the APS staff and programming contributed to their identity development. But these colonial systems continue to challenge them, rather than support them. Given UBCO’s commitments to the embody the TRC calls to action, it is important all levels of colonialism, including the policies, within the institution be examined.

5.3.5 Indigenous Spaces On Campus

The importance of Indigenous spaces on campus was not surprising, but it was interesting to see how the students framed this. When I was younger, I accepted the lack of spaces on campus as “normal,” because I had already learned Indigenous peoples were not valued in academia. Now students are aware of this imbalance, see the need for having more spaces, and are asking for it clearly.

Each of the students clearly articulated the importance of the Aboriginal Centre and all of the staff that work there. It is a safe space for students to have ceremony such as smudging and talking circles, to meet with peers and mentors, and find both academic, cultural, and personal support. The staff work to connect students with the local Indigenous communities, as well as with the rest of the campus. Given everything I have mentioned thus far, having this safe space and support is critical in order for us to successfully make it

through post-secondary. It is a place where community is built, where we connect with our peers, allies, mentors, and Elders. It is where we share food, stories, and find support navigating the colonial education system.

It has become a hub for students, but also for staff and faculty as it is the only clearly Indigenous space on campus. Faculty and staff reach out to the APS staff for support planning events, connecting with students, connecting with the Indigenous community, and many other things. I can recall doing many things my job description did not call for because there simply was no one else on campus to do the work. That's not a complaint because I understood the work still had to be done; it's more of a statement of our reality. There are only so many Indigenous staff and faculty on campus, so the same people are continuously called upon. One faculty member I have great respect for once reminded me that we do the work because there is no other choice. If we don't do it, no one else will, and we know it must be done to keep our peoples moving ahead.

Throughout Damyn and Hailey's elementary and high school education the separation between the Other and everyone else was clear. There was always an Aboriginal room, and they both interestingly note how it was always a room. "The Native room with the Native kids," as Hailey put it. For Damyn, it points out how the Indigenous programming is not woven into the school system, and that has carried over into post-secondary. There is the Aboriginal Centre, located on the second floor of the student services building, but Damyn notes how it is out of the way ("the back room" as he called it) and the signage is limited. Although the importance of the Aboriginal Centre and staff is clear, it is still separated and not given enough resources to do the work everyone is asking them to do.

Students also cited Indigenous professors as integral to their success and personal growth, with classrooms becoming safe spaces and the professors, critical mentors. As many

of our connections with community, the land, stories, family, children, and Elders have been severed over the generations, we are constantly seeking for reconnection. When adrift in a colonial institution, especially in the classrooms, having an Indigenous mentor skilled in balancing their lives in western academia is a life raft. They are “people before educators,” as Damyn said, as they bring their whole selves to the work. Damyn, Hailey, and Sarah all noted how the Indigenous Studies faculty also helped to support them in reconnecting with their Indigenous identity.

To only have a few places on campus where it feels safe to be Indigenous is not enough. We need to feel safe to be Indigenous everywhere. Peers and allies are important safe spaces for Indigenous students as they form part of their community and help create a sense of belonging. Peers can identify with the students’ histories, validating their stories. Although allies cannot identify in the same ways, the late Dr. Greg Younging once reminded me they act as an important support and an advocate when asked. The students I spoke with didn’t have the perspective or words to speak for themselves growing up, but having others on campus going through what they are going through, or having others who will support them, helps give them strength to challenge the views of what is considered “normal” in academia.

5.3.6 Shared experience, belonging, community

A large part of being Indigenous is belonging to community. Hailey feels it is an integral part of Indigenous identity, as community affirms who you are, teaches you about yourself and your culture, and holds you up with love when you need support. Most Indigenous students had to leave their community to come to post-secondary, in some cases for the first time. Hailey did not have to leave her home territory, but there is certainly a difference between attending post-secondary at the En’owkin Centre in community and

attending at a large, colonial institution located on your nation's unceded territory. Damyn left his family and friends, Violet left her entire community located in a rural area in northern Saskatchewan with a higher Indigenous population, and Sarah also left a rural area of Saskatchewan. Having a community on campus becomes very important for Indigenous students.

The community APS works to facilitate helps to fill this need through their events, academic support, and cultural programming. Indigenous students can gather to do their homework, chat with friends, find a tutor, speak with an Elder, and smudge, all while building connections between one another. Daymn, Sarah, Hailey, and Violet all spoke of the importance of finding others with stories like their own as it helped them learn about themselves in different ways, and built connections. Sarah found support from an Indigenous community that validated her identity journey. Violet noted how finding other students you can identify with is reaffirming and reassuring. Whether we live on reserve or in an urban centre, it is difficult to be Indigenous. It is part of our shared experience. We need community support to help us feel loved and create a sense of belonging while we navigate the post-secondary system.

As noted above, knowing we belong, and knowing that there are others who are rooting for us despite the challenges, can mean the difference between making it through our degree with our mental health intact, or making it through feeling hurt and lost, or giving up completely. This support goes beyond the academic supports, but extends to spiritual and emotional support. Violet specifically credits Kelly's unconditional acceptance of her with helping her accept who she was and to believe in herself. It reminded me of what my Uncle Shane said: once we are whole people, then we can do good work. We can move through our traumas, heal, love ourselves, and then go on to help others. Having Kelly support Violet to

be who she truly is, gives her the confidence to speak her truth while in classes, to honour her Indigeneity, and to push the boundaries.

5.3.7 Culture, cultural experiences, cultural support

Connected to the importance of community is the importance of culture. Our connection to the land, our ceremonies, our stories, and our spirit helps make us who we are. When we cannot nurture those connections we can become ungrounded.

When Hailey was able to fully participate in ceremony after reconnecting with her father, she felt a sense of peace she had been seeking her whole life. In a way, many Indigenous peoples are looking for this peace as well, and the pain of not having it causes us to find other ways to feel better. Attending cultural events such as the Okanagan Nation Salmon Feast that happens each September taught Sarah about the local community and culture, and allowed her to receive teachings about local Syilx ways of knowing. As I mentioned before, when Damyn first started at UBCO, I remember he attended our Aboriginal Orientation where we did a smudge with the students. I distinctly remember him saying to another student afterwards how he had been looking for this when he came to campus. After a few years he has made friends with other Indigenous students who have shown him how to reconnect to the land and to see the learning and healing that happens there. He noticed when he was not connected to the land, he would become sick. Hailey says she knows she will be spiritually stripped when she comes to campus, so she has to brace herself for that. Having her community to return to each day gives her the space to release this negative energy through ceremony.

After being told for decades that our culture and ceremony have no place in the western world, being able to access these things in post-secondary is very healing. The

education system was also a part of that removal of culture and ceremony from everyday life, so it is fitting that it helps weave it back in.

5.3.8 Program Support

The programs offered on campus, primarily through APS, were also seen as important to success by the students.

According to their website, the Aboriginal Access Studies program “is an entrance program that prepares and transitions Aboriginal learners into degree programs at UBC. The program combines both academic and non-academic activities to form a rich, full-time schedule in a supportive university setting.” I helped the other APS staff with the program’s delivery when I worked there, and I watched Indigenous students from all over Canada with varying levels of university readiness move through the program and then confidently begin their degree program. Youth who had recently finished high school, adults who hadn’t been to school in many years, and others who could not find success in high school but wanted to further their education all found a supportive environment to help them on their journey. Damyn saw the benefits of this program when he came, finding a supportive community that helped him move into his degree program. However, it is not without its difficulties. Hailey was frustrated she could not take more than three courses as she was used to taking more at the En’owkin Centre. This caused her to lose focus and she started putting her attention in other areas of her life. This program also is underfunded, with APS staff constantly working to fill the gaps to ensure students remain supported. Still, this program consistently sees a high success rate, and with more institutional support could see even more success.

Other programs, such as the tours and summer camps APS offers to high school students, help demystify the university setting for Indigenous youth and make it seem more accessible. Hailey recalls those tours as being a big reason why she wanted to go to post-

secondary in the first place. While taking an unescorted detour, she was inspired by seeing the Faculty of Creative and Critical Studies displays and wanted to be a part of that environment.

Many Indigenous students, like Hailey, live a sober life. As many of the student activities on campus tend to revolve around alcohol, Hailey found it difficult to connect with other students. Aboriginal Programs and Services is aware of this, and its programming is always dry. In fact, they ask that people in the Centre refrain from discussing things like drinking parties in order to respect the healing of their fellow students.

Violet noted how she struggled finding success in the sciences as she did not have some of the pre-requisites that would have prepared her for some of the courses. As she was from a smaller community, the pre-requisites she would have needed in high school simply were not offered. Hailey's program simply didn't exist when she transferred from the En'owkin Centre to UBCO, forcing her to go into Indigenous studies. Although APS does what it can to help students bridge into their desired programs by working closely with faculty and administrative staff, there is only so much they are able to do. Some students must change their plans as a result of administrative difficulties.

5.3.9 Learning about our history and identity through Indigenous studies

Although each of the students had taken a varying amount of Indigenous studies courses, they all mentioned how important the courses were in affirming their identity. The professors, who are "people before educators," as Damyn said, create a safe space for students to explore and develop their identity.

Learning about colonialism helped the students understand their families and communities better, as well as themselves. They could see why their family made the choices they have, why they have little connection to their own identity and culture, and why we are

seen by non-Indigenous people the way we are. They could now see why our lives unfolded the way they have, and they now had the words and understanding to start letting go of some of the anger, hurt, and confusion they may be carrying.

Some of the students were able to dig into their history and themselves, uncovering a lot of deep wounds. The course work is not just about demonstrating one's ability to retain knowledge, it was experiential learning that asks students to examine themselves and the systems they find themselves in with a more critical and holistic lens. This type of work helps students find deeper meaning in the course work.

There was a suggestion that having everyone take first-year Indigenous studies could help open up non-Indigenous students' perspectives. Indigenous students want others to know the history too because it helped them so much in knowing themselves. If everyone knows, imagine what it could do. I have heard some concerns from others on campus that doing this could create an unsafe environment, as not everyone wants to take this course. However, I do see the rationale for moving forward in this way. If we all do not know the truth, we cannot make any changes together. It cannot be a one-sided relationship. As I am writing this, it is my understanding that starting in September 2020 it will be mandatory for students to take first-year Indigenous studies.

5.4 Recommendations

As the weaver slowly creates the weaving, the pattern and design become clearer. After understanding how colonialism has continuously impacted Indigenous peoples and our identity since contact we can better understand the Indigenous reality in this country, and so within post-secondary institutions. Given the influence education has on the general population and its role in the residential school system, it is clear post-secondary institutions have a responsibility to better serve Indigenous peoples (TRC, 2015). For me and the

students I interviewed, university allowed us to see our families clearer, and so ourselves.

The Indigenous Studies professors, APS staff members, our peers, and our allies all supported us on our journey through school. However, this journey was still met with colonial roadblocks to navigate.

In September 2019, UBC Okanagan made its commitment to “meeting the challenge issued to Canadians by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada to engage in an ongoing process of reconciliation” by agreeing to implement five recommendations related to meaningful reconciliation (University of British Columbia, 2019). These five recommendations were designed to broadly address the Calls to Action related to post-secondary education and are already being implemented. In January 2020 the Senior Advisor on Indigenous Affairs position was created and filled, and the Language Fluency/Proficiency Degree is currently awaiting the Board of Governors’ and Ministry approval.

It is important to remember that these five recommendations are meant as a guide and as a starting point. Reconciliation is more than checking off recommendations on a list. The TRC Calls to Action act as a whole unit, with the Calls being related to one another. The western worldview tends to compartmentalize issues (education, nursing, law, environment, child welfare), whereas Indigenous peoples see these things as inextricably interconnected. In order to truly be able to heal together, we must see the entire picture rather than a small portion of it. When we look at these issues as separate, it prevents us from seeing the connections and from being able to support one-another in this work.

This study has attempted to illustrate how our history and present are connected, and how the actions of the institution as a whole and the actions of individual staff, faculty, and students together contribute not only to Indigenous student academic success, but also to their understanding and acceptance of their Indigenous identity. If UBC Okanagan is able to

respond to the needs of Indigenous students (and Indigenous staff and faculty) in a meaningful way, more Indigenous people will be willing to not only attend the institution for their undergraduate degree, but also stay through their graduate work. From there they will be in a strong position to return to their community to do good work there, or to stay with the institution to become academics or staff members. Damyn identified the need to increase Indigenous representation on campus. While in my position in the Office of Research Services I have talked with many professors and staff members who have expressed the need to have more Indigenous representation throughout the faculties and schools, as well as within faculty and staff. However, in order to do this, UBCO must become a culturally safe space that is aware of its legacy of colonialism, and must constantly strive to become the most whole version of itself. By adopting a radically honest, yet gentle approach, the institution will grow into a place where all members of the campus community feel as though they belong.

5.4.1 Culture Change

From my perspective, the research and the Indigenous students are talking about changing the overall culture on the campus. Damyn referred to an external pressure reinforced by the university that tells him “you’re not supposed to make it,” while at the same time “it tries to pull off this façade like it’s not there.” He later referred to it as the culture of the institution, as certain issues are given more attention and support than others. He gave an example of how certain courses are seen as critical in a degree program, while others such as Indigenous studies, are not. Without understanding our deep history and relationships, we cannot hope to move forward in a good way. As Elder Chris Marchand said, we cannot have reconciliation without first having the truth.

Sarah expressed concern during the talking circle, saying it is unlikely the university will tear down or modify what they have built, such as their colonial foundations. In some ways I agree with what she is saying, as these foundations are deeply rooted and changing would be a huge investment. Perhaps truly decolonizing and Indigenizing the institution is not possible, but I truly believe this is an opportunity for each of us to look at our core beliefs and ask ourselves if we need to make adjustments. Decolonization asks us to look at how our beliefs influence our behaviours, so we can make different, more educated choices. It is often the habit of post-secondary institutions to focus on the problems and on finances, rather than looking at what can be changed. However, adopting a decolonizing perspective allows us to expand our gaze and see the possibilities rather than the limitations.

One of UBCO's commitments towards meaningful reconciliation states "Develop and deliver an Indigenous culture orientation program for all faculty and staff at UBC's Okanagan campus" (University of British Columbia, 2019). I agree an orientation program would be very beneficial, as many members of the campus community have limited understanding of the Syilx people, and of Indigenous peoples in general. However, "culture orientation" does not go deep enough when it comes to truly understanding our colonial history and its ongoing impacts, and moving away from them to a more holistic way of knowing, being, and doing. According to the National Aboriginal Health Organization (2008, p.4), cultural safety goes beyond being culturally sensitive or oriented to "analyzing power imbalances, institutional discrimination, colonization and colonial relationships." It also works to address these power imbalances that are woven in our systems in order to create a place where Indigenous peoples feel safe (First Nations Health Authority, n.d.). Addressing these issues will also help non-Indigenous peoples who have been impacted by colonial practices such as LGBTQ+ and racialized students, staff, and faculty.

In order to ensure the information is localized, Syilx history and perspectives must be central in building this training. This knowledge will help the campus community better understand its relationship with both the host nation and the unceded land we are on. However, the broader context of Indigenous reality must also be acknowledged in order to understand the complete picture, including the stories of urban, Inuit, and Métis peoples.

I feel it is important students receive some training as well. They may end up working with Indigenous peoples at some point (e.g. as teachers, nurses, social workers, managers, engineers, etc.), or be in classes with other Indigenous students, so it is important to build a foundation of understanding now. As mentioned earlier, allies are an important support and safe space for Indigenous peoples. Student orientations could be an opportunity to start that conversation by using decolonial language, and embodying a decolonial attitude. Having training or awareness-building available for non-Indigenous students will also help set an anti-racist expectation at the start of the post-secondary journey.

For the training to be successful, it is important to have a safe space available. As each of us is at a different stage on the path to decolonization and reconciliation, some people will be exploring unfamiliar and uncomfortable feelings (Churchill, Parent-Pergeron, Smylie, Ward, Fridkin, Smylie, & Firestone, 2017). There must be a place for people to voice their fears safely and then to move through them to a new perspective (hooks, 1996). Once the campus community understands our shared history and the power dynamics woven in our systems, it becomes harder to ignore these imbalances. Each of us will be called to continuously examine our personal biases that influence our day-to-day behaviours. It is important to remember decolonization is an ongoing journey that cannot be understood through a one- or two- or even four-day course. It requires constant commitment, humility, and support to do as well, so the approach must be holistically done, and institutionally

supported. This means the support must be ongoing, as staff and faculty may need assistance integrating a more culturally safe perspective into their work environments. In order for it to be meaningful, this support must be guided by Indigenous peoples as well.

5.4.2 Policy change

Having more staff, faculty, and students aware of our Indigenous truths, as well as the structural power imbalances within the institution, will mean we can no longer pretend things are operating fine. It is more than simply knowing of these imbalances and inequities; it is about addressing them on as many levels as possible so balance can be restored. Embodying a holistic perspective will not only serve Indigenous peoples better, but the whole campus community as well.

As this work has attempted to illustrate, colonialism is embedded in our institutions at all levels, and influences our day-to-day operations and interactions with one-another. This is true from the application process, through to graduation. Although APS has worked extensively with Nursing and Engineering to create a supportive admissions process, and the Aboriginal Access Studies program sees great success in transitions to degree programs, the reality is this is not actually *changing* things institutionally. It is an Indigenous perspective wedged into the colonial system, which can only do so much. I am suggesting we examine our foundations with a critical, reflexive, decolonial, Indigenized lens. This includes our forms, signage, buildings, applications, acronyms, and operating procedures, as well as how we present ourselves to both Indigenous community and the world.

I am currently working in the Office of Research Services as the Indigenous Community Liaison. My role is to support both researchers and Indigenous community in creating meaningful partnerships where research is designed to benefit all peoples involved. However, from my perspective this is more than about following ethics guidelines, it is about

examining how we do research as an institution and changing what no longer fits for Indigenous peoples. Although this makes the academy uncomfortable, it is critical we change our colonial research practices, including ethics guidelines that do not fully consider Indigenous ethics, data ownership and management, extractive methodologies and methods, and the idea of the researcher as “expert.”

5.4.3 Increase Indigenous Student Services

As mentioned throughout this document, Aboriginal Programs and Services is a critical student support, acting as a home-away-from-home for Indigenous students. However, APS is the only space dedicated to Indigenous peoples, so its resources are continuously accessed by various members of the campus community. Given its importance APS must be involved in the decolonization and Indigenization processes, but we must avoid putting all of the strain in one area. Indigenous staff and faculty often do most of the emotional and physical labour, but if this process is going to be meaningful the labour must be shared throughout the campus. There is a need for more dedicated staff and resources across the campus in order to avoid tokenizing the work, and to ensure all areas of campus have support in their efforts to decolonize. This support is important, particularly in departments with less awareness and understanding of Indigenous peoples. As Damyn noted, some professors in the History faculty did not welcome Indigenous perspectives. This makes it harder for Indigenous students to feel respected in their respective programs, and across campus.

Indigenous students have expressed how important the cultural support provided by APS is, as it not only allows them to learn about who they are and validate their identity, it also allows them to embrace their spirit, heart, and body into the learning process and become whole people. Once we are able to accept and embody our whole being, we are able

to heal and do good work. This healing is important, as it is difficult to find emotional and spiritual nourishment in the western classroom, so we must be able to provide this space for ourselves. APS works to provide the best access they can to cultural supports, but their resources are often stretched, with staff members wearing several different hats throughout the day. Having expanded and consistent funding for cultural supports would ease the burden.

As Elders are an essential part of Indigenous communities, their support and input is important in this work. APS currently has two Syilx Elders come to the Aboriginal Centre once a week to smudge with the students, and offer guidance and support. Given their importance to Indigenous health and wellbeing, I feel it is necessary to ask them what they feel is appropriate in order to better support Indigenous students. I would like to add that having Elder supports across campus would not only benefit students, but staff and faculty as well.

5.4.4 Improve Health and Wellness Services

I was sad to hear how Hailey and Violet had such negative experiences when they sought Health and Wellness (HW) services. I also understand from my own experience with the health care system that the approach to services is very western, following the medical model that holds a narrow view of what health (both physical and mental) means. There is little room for Indigenous perspectives on health and healing.

There is now an Indigenous counsellor on staff who works in HW and APS equally in order to better serve Indigenous students. This is certainly a help, but it may not be appropriate for all students. It is important that all staff are trained in Indigenous cultural safety in order to create a more supportive and holistic environment. Additionally, as the numbers of Indigenous students (and students in general) enrolling at UBCO is increasing, it

is important to consider what meaningful expansion of services would look like. It would be timely to explore HW policies and procedures with a decolonizing lens and determine where things could be changed. As Indigenous peoples see healing and health in more holistic terms, it would be beneficial to consider how this perspective can contribute to HW.

5.4.5 Dedicated Indigenous Spaces and Resources

In order to do this work, the campus must increase dedicated Indigenous spaces and resources. As the students mentioned, safe spaces for Indigenous peoples are limited to the Aboriginal Centre, classrooms with Indigenous professors, and allies. The students emphasized the need for access to more safe spaces in order to smudge, pray, connect with one another, and even bring family. In essence, they asked to have more places where they are free to fully be and express themselves in a holistic way.

Indigenous staff and faculty have worked to remedy this by raising the Syilx (Okanagan) Nation flag permanently, adding Syilx art such as the story poles, creating the Bachelor of Nsyilxcn Language Fluency that is currently awaiting Ministry approval (<https://ccgs.ok.ubc.ca/undergraduate/nsyilxcn/>), and the planned outdoor classroom and learning garden. Indigenous staff and faculty also worked towards the campus's commitment to the TRC calls to action, which has resulted in the creation of the Senior Advisor on Indigenous Affairs in order to ensure the work moves forward in a good way. Having the support of the administration on campus is critical to changing the culture of the campus, and the creation of safer spaces for Indigenous peoples. However, there must be dedicated resources to move the support from words and planning to action.

There are many reports highlighting the need for change in the relationship with Indigenous peoples, and discussing ways to move forward and make these changes. We know from the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, the *Truth and Reconciliation*

Commission Calls to Action, the *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls to Action*, and the *Campus Diversity Report*, what we can do. Now we can take the steps forward and do them. Without resources the changes will be slow and challenging. I have been in many meetings with Indigenous community, students, staff, and faculty both on- and off-campus who spend their lives working to improve the lives of their peoples, but they speak of fatigue, exhaustion, burnout, and loneliness as they are the few on the frontlines each day. We have no choice but to keep doing the work despite these challenges. If we do not, who will? However, it is important we strive for better at UBC, and leaving the work to others is not meaningful decolonization or reconciliation. It is the status quo, and in order to do better, there must be consistent, long-term resources committed to these efforts system-wide. This means we need more Indigenous staff and faculty, and we need more non-Indigenous allies. Current staff and faculty can be offered cultural safety training as mentioned, and students must be taught that decolonization, truth and reconciliation, and Indigenousization are the new status quo. By encouraging a holistic education for students, we will also be nurturing potential future staff and faculty who share our vision of a healthy campus community.

5.5 Summary

Indigenous peoples asking for more Indigenous spaces, support, resources, and people in colonial institutions and systems is nothing new. Since contact our ancestors and relatives fought to keep space for our people, while the settlers spread their ways across the land. Each day Indigenous nurses, lawyers, administrators, business owners, students, engineers, and scientists push the boundaries of the settler society to encourage them to widen their gaze and see the whole picture. We are asking non-Indigenous peoples to reflect on their history and their biases, and to consider how unbelievable it is that Indigenous peoples must fight and

beg to have safe spaces to fully be themselves *on their own traditional, unceded, ancestral lands*.

There is a tendency for humans to focus on the problems in a situation and the difficulties in solving these problems, rather than actually solving them. Conversations during meetings where administration, staff, and faculty discuss how to make changes inevitably revert to the “realities” of budget and policy that ultimately prevent us from making meaningful changes. I am suggesting that this way of thinking has been taught to us as a result of our western education system, and by choosing to challenge these worldviews, unlearn our colonial programming, and learn a more holistic way of being we will be better able to face these challenges. Of course making the types of changes I am referring to will be costly, and will take a lot of time and commitment from everyone. And as the students reminded me, perhaps there is no need for institutional change of this type. But nothing worth doing is ever easy, and given the influence this institution has on the country and the world it seems important. It took us just over 150 years to get here, so of course it will take time to heal. We were willing to invest our time and resources to keep the colonial worldview that only benefits a few going, but are we willing to invest the same in order to create a more balanced environment for everyone?

Chapter Six – Summary

6.1 Reflecting on My Journey

I've never liked writing conclusions, and this was the hardest for me to write. How could I sum up four-and-a-half life-altering years of learning and change? When I first came to graduate school, I had no idea what to expect. I certainly never imagined the journey would transform me. I knew I would be “smarter,” something I felt was important in order to prove to myself and others that I had value. I also knew it would help me reconnect with my Indigenous identity, and I hoped I would be able to do something that would help Indigenous peoples on this path to truth, reconciliation, decolonization, and Indigenization.

I have changed so much over these past four and a half years. My life looks nothing like it did when I started this journey. I have learned so much about the history of this country, and understand so much more about why the world, my family, and I are the way we are. I did not simply read the research and talk to the students, I incorporated the lessons into my being. Each new learning caused me to realign myself, sometimes requiring me to take a step away from the work for a time in order to get grounded in this new understanding. It was not an easy process, as some of the readings triggered me deeply and I did not know how to deal with it. This trigger could cause me to shut down at times in order to try and deal with my emotions, and other times it made me angry, sad, or brought up feelings of grief. However, as I worked through these feelings, my desire to continue this path of reconnection with my Indigenous identity was constantly reaffirmed and deepened.

This reconnection is helping me release some of my depression and anxiety, and hopefully is allowing me to eventually be of better service to Indigenous peoples. This research has given me the opportunity to heal in many ways, to accept and embody who I am,

and to encourage my children to do the same. Learning to become my whole self meant doing deep work, and I now believe it is the most important and meaningful thing I can do in order to do good work and be a good person. I recognize I have a long way to go, and the journey to decolonization and Indigenization is continuous. In a way, that is part of the beauty of it all.

I was also able to see the students who worked with me grow and find themselves, and they helped reaffirm what I am doing. Their strength keeps me pushing ahead. They also taught me that although it can feel like it sometimes, I am not alone on this journey. There are many Indigenous people on campus working to challenge the status quo and make space for themselves and others.

When I first started my program, I was very suspicious of the campus and its administration. I had been witness to rich, beautiful words spoken and written by administration and media relations press releases about meaningful relationships with Indigenous peoples, yet seen how actions rarely aligned with those words. However, over the past few years that has changed dramatically. The TRC report brought more attention to Indigenous issues, and I saw many Indigenous staff, faculty, and some non-Indigenous staff and faculty, use the momentum to draw attention to the work they were already doing, and encourage the campus to commit to truth and reconciliation. I now see non-Indigenous staff and faculty paying more attention to Indigenous issues and people, asking questions, and exploring workshops like cultural safety. It is like the campus is waking up, and although we have a long way to go on this journey to ensure Indigenous peoples can be their whole selves on campus, it is encouraging to see this shift in energy.

6.2 Lessons learned

When I first decided I wanted to explore Indigenous identity, I had an inkling it would be a bit of a rabbit hole. Of course, I had no idea the depth this rabbit hole went because if I did, I probably would have changed my topic. But because I was also desperately hoping to find out more about who I was, I couldn't imagine any other topic to explore.

I wanted to understand what it meant to *be* Indigenous in this country, which meant understanding how we got to where we are at today. It was through authors such as Bonita Lawrence, Marie Battiste, and JP Restoule writing about the influence of the Indian Act and the impacts of colonialism on our lives that I began to see how our relationships with the colonizers impacted and influenced Indigenous identity.

Once I began to understand these pieces, I also began to understand why I didn't have a Status card until I was in my 30s, why people used to tell me to apply for Métis Status, and why I felt so ashamed of who I was. I went through periods of grieving where I was either angry or sad about my own situation and the situations of Indigenous peoples in general. I wanted to move to my reserve, dismantle institutions, and challenge the status quo. It took me a long time to work through and understand those feelings. I needed to feel those feelings that I had suppressed my whole life in my attempts to fit in, and then find ways to let them go. It was not unlike the grieving process, where I had to come to accept our history and present. Once I was able to accept these things I could look at them anew, using my x^wməθk^wəyəm worldview in order to see our interconnections and relationships, and to find the gifts in this process. This allowed me to begin to find a way to shift my focus towards finding the good to build off of and seeing the opportunities.

Through listening to the students I began to understand better how community is integral to Indigenous identity, as community teaches us ways of knowing, being, and doing while providing a place to belong. It reflects us back to ourselves, passes on teachings, and shows us how vital relationships are as we are all interconnected. We cannot function without one another as each of us is here for a reason.

I began to see Indigenous identity as more than complex. It is shaped by community, culture, our family both immediate and extended, our experiences and our own personality, the media, and by our relationships with those things. Our identity is also influenced by our perceptions and reactions to these relationships. One person may perceive a certain situation as shameful while another may see it with indifference, and our own ability to deal with those perceptions and reactions further impacts this. If we do not have a framework to understand our feelings and perceptions, it is easier to fall into negative thinking patterns. This is why post-secondary has become a place for Indigenous peoples to both reconnect with themselves while finding ways to find a better job and help their community.

Although UBCO has made great strides at improving their relationship with Indigenous peoples, it is important to understand that the work is ongoing. As the students illustrated, there are many things the institution can do in order to better support Indigenous students. In order for reconciliation to happen, Indigenous peoples (staff, faculty, students, and the community) must be able to be who they truly are without fear of judgement from the institution or the people in it. In fact, it is up to the university and those working there to examine their own beliefs and behaviours, challenge their colonial thinking patterns and make space to see the value in the wisdom Indigenous peoples bring with them. This means it is more than just implementing programs or adding more Indigenous content to courses, it means healing the culture of the university from the wounds of colonialism and freeing us to

create a holistic environment where students, staff, faculty, and their work are given space to thrive.

6.3 Areas for further study

While exploring the readings and talking to the students I found myself distracted by innumerable tangents that were connected to the work I was doing. I touched on many themes while conducting my Indigenous Contextualized Review, most of which could have opened up new areas of research.

I was very interested in understanding more about how trauma is passed intergenerationally, and related to the idea that trauma and shame influence Indigenous identity in many ways. There is growing research in this area, and it is important to understand these things in order to heal from them.

Observing how Indigenous students from very different backgrounds often shared similar stories and experiences was one of the first things that got me thinking about the interconnections between us in a new way. Indigenous peoples from across this country, whether they are on- or off-reserve, are Status or non-Status, are Métis, Inuit, or mixed heritage, have dealt with the strange and difficult balancing act required to live with the dominant society. But I also began to notice that these themes seemed to be echoed around the world. Indigenous peoples around the world have had their ways of living forever altered by colonialism, and although the form and severity of these impacts vary widely, we share the common thread of having our identity and ways of life attacked. We also share the common thread of healing and finding our way back to ourselves.

Although I offered recommendations, I believe that in order for them to be meaningful and to appropriately reflect the current situations of students, the university must meet and talk with Indigenous students, staff, faculty, and community members in order to

understand the best way to approach this work. However, it is important not to overburden us as we are often called upon. It is up to the individual to do their own research as well. As with all work with Indigenous peoples, it cannot be done without their full partnership and consent.

6.4 Concluding thoughts

In the end I am not sure I was truly writing about “Indigenous identity” *per se*. However, I do feel I was able to share how Indigenous peoples’ identities are shaped and how they change in relationship to ourselves and others. I was able to understand more about myself and my own family, and to start healing wounds I didn’t even realize I had. I hope that anyone reading this was able to find a small piece of themselves in this, and that it allowed them to find some of their own healing. I hope that you are able to be who you are, and be proud of who you are.

hay ce:p qə for reading.

néc'amət ct

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