

***NE KWIN DIST GGAN* (THE LIGHT IS LIT AGAIN): HEALING TRAUMA IN THE
WET'SUWET'EN NATION WITH INDIGENOUS FOCUSING ORIENTED THERAPY**

by

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Abstract

Contemporary Indigenous mental health research is beginning to address colonization, contextualizing Indigenous health within a history of colonial relationships and inadequate mental health responses. In practice, however, dominant counselling models for mental health in Canada have neglected the Indigenous perspective and there is a paucity of research regarding interventions that address psychological trauma with Indigenous populations. The Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs recognize the profound impacts that historical trauma has on Wet'suwet'en people and are utilizing Indigenous Focusing Oriented Therapy (IFOT), a trauma therapy model that is collective, land-based, and intergenerational, to help their Nation heal. Drawing on Indigenous and decolonizing methodologies, and supported by narrative inquiry and analysis, this thesis explores how IFOT is shaped by Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing and being and mobilized at the level of individuals, families, house groups, and the Nation. 11 Wet'suwet'en members and IFOT practitioners participated in this study that utilized a sharing circle process privileging storytelling for data collection and interpretation. The findings demonstrated that IFOT helped to heal trauma so that Wet'suwet'en people could experience greater connection with Wet'suwet'en *yintah* (land), and *c'idede'* (teachings and stories from long ago). The strategic implementation of IFOT by Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs created a culturally pertinent model for community-based healing. Through IFOT and in alignment with Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing and being, participants gained connection to *yintah*, ancestors, spirituality, language, stories, and ceremony. IFOT helped individuals to experience a sense of collective belonging that encouraged them to take up their responsibilities as Wet'suwet'en people within the traditional system of governance. IFOT supported the reclamation of Wet'suwet'en identities, which became a foundation for self-determination and social action.

IFOT was decolonizing in its promotion of Wet'suwet'en wellbeing and healing from within the community. Continued healing in the Wet'suwet'en Nation will be a gradual process, rooted in Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing and being.

Lay Summary

While Indigenous mental health research is beginning to address colonization, counselling psychology has largely disregarded Indigenous approaches to wellness and there has been little research to explore psychological trauma interventions with Indigenous peoples. This thesis explores the Wet'suwet'en Nation's implementation of Indigenous Focusing Oriented Therapy (IFOT). This research uses Indigenous and decolonizing methodologies, as well as narrative analysis and inquiry to answer the question: how IFOT is shaped by Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing and being and mobilized at the level of individuals, families, house groups, and the Nation? 11 Wet'suwet'en members and IFOT practitioners were the participants for this study. Together with the research team, they collaboratively identified the following key themes: foundation for IFOT integration, connection to *yintahh* (land), ancestors, body, language, stories, ceremony, and spirituality, fostering Wet'suwet'en traditional governance, reclaiming Wet'suwet'en identities, supporting helpers to do their work, fostering Wet'suwet'en wellbeing and decolonization, and strengthening healing.

Preface

This study was carried out in collaboration with the Office of the Wet'suwet'en (OW) and was co-created with an advisory group of hereditary chiefs (Ts'akë ze' Wilat [Sue Alfred], Dinī ze' Madeek [Jeff Brown], Dinī ze' Neekupdeh [Daren George], Dinī ze' Smogelgem [Warner Naziel], and Gretchen Woodman). This study was structured by Indigenous and decolonizing methodologies, as well as by narrative inquiry and analysis. The methods included a sharing circle process that privileged storytelling for data collection and analysis. Both data collection and its analysis were conducted collaboratively with the participant group. In adherence with Indigenous methodologies, the findings rely on the stories shared by participants and their own interpretation. My own positionality as a non-Indigenous researcher has inevitably shaped this study; however, I have endeavored to situate the research within Wet'suwet'en epistemologies.

A version of chapter 2 has been submitted for publication. Panofsky, S., Buchanan, M. J., Goodwill, A., & John, R. (2020) Indigenous Trauma Intervention Research in Canada: A Narrative Literature Review. My contribution for this article included compiling the research, conducting the analysis, and writing the document. Dr. Marla Buchanan provided the guidance regarding methodology and feedback on the article draft and final version. Both Dr. Alanaise Goodwill and Roger John provided feedback and recommendations which were incorporated into the article.

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List of Abbreviations

ANABIP	<i>Anuk Nu'At'en Ba'glgh' iyi z'ilhdic</i> (We are talking about our ways)
BC	British Columbia
IFOT	Indigenous Focusing Oriented Therapy
OW	Office of the Wet'suwet'en
PTSD	Posttraumatic Stress Disorder
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Glossary

Anuk Nu'At'en Ba'glgh' iyi z'ilhdic (anook-noh / aden / ba-ggh-yegh / silh-dic): We are talking about our ways

'Anuc niwh'it' (anook-noh / noh-ut-en): our laws

Balhats (bah-hlats): feast system

C'idede' (gui-day-day): stories from long ago

C'ilhts'ëkhyu (guihl-ts-eh-hryoo): Big Frog Clan

Cin k'ikh (kyun / guh): trail of songs or history

Dinī ze' (duh-nee / zay): male hereditary chief

Gitdint'en (gui-dum-t-en): Bear or Wolf Clan

Hiltus (hulhtus): strength

Kwin gghenen dil (Kwun-gghen-nen-deel): they returned to the fireside

Lhokwah (lo-kwah)- Big ice (glacial) river near Bernie Lakes that a war party crossed pre-contact

Likhsilyu (luh-sil-yoo): Small Frog Clan

Likhts'amisyu (luh-tsah-mis-yoo): Fireweed Clan

Ne kwin dist ggan (nay-kwuhn-dist-ggan): The light is lit again

Niwkinic (noh-kuh-nuk): our language

Niwhhts'ide'nī (noh / tsuh-deh-nee): our ancestors

Nk'ëdeh' kwin ggnenīnge (nkay-deh / kwun-ggen-nay-neen-gay): When did you come home?

Tabee misiyh (ta-be / ma-sih): thank you very much

Tsayu (tsa-yoo): Beaver Clan

Ts'akë ze' (ts-ah-kheh / zay) female hereditary chief

Udaggi (oodagee): God

Widzin Kwah (wud-zun / kwa): body of water larger than a stream, meaning the Bulkley River

Wiggus (wi-goos): living in good relations (wi goos)

Yintah (yin-tah): traditional territory, “we are the land and the land is us”

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the advisory group and participants of this research project, Ts'akë ze' Wilat, Dinĩ ze' Madeek, Dinĩ ze' Neekupdeh, Dinĩ ze' Smogelgem, Gretchen Woodman, Tanya Brown, Russell Lewis, Sandra Harris, Lorraine Naziel, Jeremy Dumont, and Jolene Andrew for teaching me about the depth of connection to *yintah*, and how it heals.

Chapter 1: Introduction

It is widely accepted that Indigenous peoples disproportionately experience psychological distress and poor health compared with non-Indigenous peoples in Canada (Adelson, 2005; Gone et al., 2019; Kolahdooz et al., 2015; Statistics Canada, 2018). Contemporary Indigenous mental health research is beginning to address colonization (Nelson & Wilson, 2017), contextualizing Indigenous health within a history of colonial relationships and inadequate mental health responses (McIntyre et al., 2017). McIntyre et al. (2017) found that epidemiological surveys of Indigenous populations in Canada, the United States, New Zealand and Australia indicated that mental health prevalence rates may be similar between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, but the mental health burdens are due to higher rates of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and lack of adequate mental health care. In particular, the construct of Indigenous historical trauma has been used to explain the health disparities and elevated rates of psychological distress experienced by Indigenous peoples (Brave Heart, 1998; Gone et al., 2019). Indigenous historical trauma is a distinct form of psychological trauma; it is understood to have originated from colonization, and its impacts are collective, encompassing cumulative adverse events that span generations (Gone et al., 2019).

The Office of the Wet'suwet'en (OW) is taking a unique approach to healing historical trauma in the Wet'suwet'en Nation through their strategic implementation of Indigenous Focusing Oriented Therapy (IFOT). The OW is a non-profit society, created in 1994, as the central office for the Wet'suwet'en Nation, whose territory spans from Burns Lake to Hazelton in Northwest British Columbia (BC). The OW is governed by thirteen hereditary chiefs and was created during the broad community engagement and cultural revitalization that occurred during the *Delgamuukw-Gisdaywa v. British Columbia* court case (Office of the Wet'suwet'en, 2020).

In 1997, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that Indigenous rights and title to the land have never been extinguished on territories over which treaties have not been signed and oral histories may serve as legal evidence in a court of law (Gordon, 2005).

The Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs recognize the profound impacts that historical trauma has on Wet'suwet'en people and are utilizing IFOT, a trauma therapy model that is collective, land-based, and intergenerational, to help their Nation heal. Wet'suwet'en people demonstrate exceptional resilience despite the impacts of colonial processes. At the same time, trauma is at the core of health concerns for Wet'suwet'en people and linked to the systems and processes that result in ill health. Since 2017, the OW has facilitated the training of 20 strategically chosen chiefs, community leaders, and front-line staff in IFOT through the Justice Institute of British Columbia (JIBC) yearlong program (D. Pierre, Personal Communication, January 20, 2020).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has called for closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous indicators of health, particularly mental health (Truth and Reconciliation Canada, 2015). This research aims to address this call to action by the TRC: describing how IFOT is shaped by Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing and being and is mobilized in Wet'suwet'en communities, will inform the OW wellness strategy and may have transferability to the application of IFOT and other Indigenous mental health interventions and research across Canada.

1.1 Locating Myself

My name is Sarah Panofsky and I am writing as a white, heterosexual woman. I grew up in Tiohtiá:ke, Montreal on unceded territory of the Kanien'kehá:ka Nation. My parents were both third generation Canadians, with ancestry from Great Britain and Lithuania. As a part of research for a master's thesis in Human Geography, I first travelled to Northwest BC to study

Indigenous concerns within the environmental assessment process for the Northern Gateway Pipeline Project. I was enamored by the land, the people, and how communities, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, lived dependent on each other and the land. I worked with the OW in 2010-2011, compiling an ethnographic study of their navigation of the environmental assessment process for the Enbridge project. I considered how eurocentric laws and processes did not allow for the existence of Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies of holism and interconnection. For the subsequent seven years, I lived on Gitxsan territory in Hazelton, coordinating community development projects with the Gitxsan and Wet'suwet'en peoples. As coordinator of a community farm with a mandate to build youth mental health through connection to the land, I took the yearlong IFOT program. I was the only non-Indigenous participant, forcing me to critically reflect on the role of non-Indigenous peoples in healing work with Indigenous communities. This experience exposed me to the potential of IFOT as Indigenous-focused, collective, intergenerational, and rooted in the land and body. My own understanding and embodiment of holism, relationality, spirituality, and connection to the land that are inherent to life in the rural and remote Northwest, have been gradual and continue to be in process. This way of knowing is very different from the individualist, secular humanism that shaped me. My experience in Northwest BC is what compelled me to return to university to study counselling psychology.

My work with Indigenous communities has developed gradually and is ongoing. Max (2005) describes being an ally as “how to stand as part of a circle, not ahead or behind, but alongside Aboriginal peoples as equal partners” (p. 92). In this research, I positioned myself as an ally, I attempted to stand alongside people of the Wet'suwet'en Nation to undertake a process and create a thesis that are decolonizing. In this context, I understand decolonizing to mean

supportive of Wet'suwet'en individuals, families, house groups, and the Wet'suwet'en Nation in ways that are important to them. This involved being guided by an advisory group of hereditary chiefs and working from Wet'suwet'en worldviews to collect and interpret the stories that were the foundation of this work. This thesis provides an explicitly local analysis of a decolonizing therapeutic model. My own story as a non-Indigenous researcher unambiguously shaped and was shaped by the story I tell.

1.2 Wet'suwet'en Ways of Knowing and Being

The Wet'suwet'en people have lived in the Widzin Kwah (Bulkley River) watershed for thousands of years. Wet'suwet'en means "people of the lower drainage" (Mills, 1994, p. 36), meaning lower relative to Babine Lake. Mills (1994) described the earliest *cin k'ikh* of the Wet'suwet'en:

From the earliest time they depict the Wet'suwet'en sharing a salmon-fishing village with the Gitksan and other Athapaska groups (the Tahltan, the Carrier, and the Sekani) at Dizkle, four miles up the Bulkley River from the present site of Hagwilget. There, the Wet'suwet'en, like these other peoples, lived in large, named cedar-plank houses presided over by a head chief. The territory around the village is described as belonging to Goohlhat, a particular Wet'suwet'en chief, whose people had the sole prerogative to use it. Thus, from the most ancient history, the Wet'suwet'en describe themselves as taking part in the Northwest Coast cultural system, in which territory by particular, named hereditary chiefs on behalf of house members. (p. 37-38)

The *cin k'ikh* describe the Wet'suwet'en living on their territory since "the beginning of time" and "since the first days" (Mills, 1994, p.76).

The Wet'suwet'en hereditary system of governance, made up of clans, houses, feasts, and chiefly titles structures society. The following statement by Dinī ze' Wah Tah Keg'ht (Henry Alfred) explains the relationship between these institutions:

My name is Henry Alfred and I am a Wet'suwet'en hereditary chief from the *Laksilyu* clan or Small Frogs. My hereditary chief's name is Wah Tah Keg'ht which means 'Old Man.' I am from the House on Top of Flat Rocks or *Tsekalhaiyax*. I took the name in 1969 when my uncle died and I paid most of the expenses for the headstone feast.

We come from a matrilineal society, which means your clan is derived from your mother's side. My father, Peter Alfred, Chief Kanots, is from the Wolf clan and my mother from the Small Frog clan. All my mother's children are therefore from the Small Frog clan.

When you inherit a chief's name the traditional territory goes with the name you inherit. A hereditary chief is groomed from a very young age. Not just anyone is given a chief's name. The person is usually someone who leads a good life, is respected by the people, helpful to other people, and, most of all, respects the position and responsibilities that go along with being a hereditary chief . . . Things are done according to our own Wet'suwet'en laws. (Chief Wah Tah Keg'ht, Henry Alfred, in Mills, 1994, p. 101)

Wet'suwet'en clans are: *C'ilhts'ëkhyu*, Big Frog Clan, *Likhsilyu*, Small Frog Clan, *Gidimt'en*, Bear/Wolf Clan, *Likhts'amisyu*, Fireweed Clan, and *Tsayu*, Beaver Clan (Morin, 2016). A house group contains members of an extended family and two or more house groups make up each clan. Each house is run by a chief who is advised by wing chiefs. A head chief represents all of the clan. Those who become chiefs have been mentored in the clan system,

laws, history, spirituality and culture and lead by example (Morin, 2016). Political and social decisions are made in the *balhats*, feast system, which is based on a deep respect of spirituality and interconnectedness with the land, the animals, and the people. With an ongoing system of credit and debt, feasts encourage relationships of reciprocity and close ties (Daly, 2005; Mills, 1994; Morin, 2016; Panofsky, 2011).

Wet'suwet'en law establishes the principles which govern human relations as well as relations between humans and the land, the animals, and the spirit world. The '*Anuc niwh'it*', Our Law states:

1. Our occupation of the territory for living, economic, cultural, spiritual and others' purposes so as to provide for the many generations of our people to come;
2. Full access to the comprehensive range of natural resources so that we can engage in economic, cultural, spiritual and other related endeavors;
3. The continued reinforcement and full enjoyment of our house, clan, and feast system;
4. The ecological health and sustainability of our territory so that our children and our children's children can continue to enjoy the harmony, bounty and beauty of the land;
5. The full exercise of our cultural pursuits on the land and with regard to natural resources;
6. The affirmation of our spiritual values with regard to the land and all of the living things it contains; and,
7. The recognized presence of jurisdictional and institutional arrangements which will enable us to fully exercise Wet'suwet'en governance so that we are able to accomplish our social, economic, environmental, cultural, spiritual and political goals in relation to our entire territory. (Wet'suwet'en view of Treaty, 1997, Statement of Hereditary Chiefs)

The '*Anuc niwh 'it*' underlines traditional governance of house, clan, and feast system as structuring life of the Wet'suwet'en people. Connection to the land in all aspects of life, cultural, economic, spiritual and others is central. Spirituality underlies relationship to the land. Harmony is valued. Self-determination in exercising social, economic, environmental, cultural, spiritual and political goals is upheld (Mills, 1994).

The Wet'suwet'en Wellness Working Group is a collaboration of Hereditary Chiefs and elected (Band) and community leaders that was assembled to serve the health and wellbeing of Wet'suwet'en children through the *Anuk Nu'At'en Ba'glgh' iyi z'ilhdic* (ANABIP) program. ANABIP works collaboratively with the Ministry of Child and Family Development to support children and families in culturally meaningful ways (Office of the Wet'suwet'en, 2012). The Working Group developed a holistic conceptual framework to depict Wet'suwet'en wellness (See Figure 1.1). The center of the framework is *yintah*, which depicts the connection between people and the land—"we are the land and the land is us" (Office of the Wet'suwet'en, 2012, p. 3). Five themes surround *yintah*: "(a) Being seen/being heard; (b) *hiltus*; (c) Spirituality; (d) Sustainable livelihood; and (e) Social Responsibility" (Office of the Wet'suwet'en, 2012, p. 3). Cultural competencies highlighted in the wellness framework include coming of age ceremonies, knowledge of genealogy, father and mother clan, knowledge of protocols and laws, rituals, ceremony, stories and medicines, and comfort on the land, reduction footprint and territory for healing.



Figure 1 Wet'suwet'en Conceptual Wellness Framework (Office of the Wet'suwet'en, 2012, p. 4)

Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing and being are grounded in Wet'suwet'en law and institutions, which stipulate the principles of interconnection and reciprocity underlying relations between humans and among humans and the land, the animals, and the spirit world. As Kovach (2017) explained, Indigenous methodologies locate the research project within tribal epistemologies. This research that explores the implementation of IFOT in the Wet'suwet'en Nation is located within Wet'suwet'en epistemologies.

1.3 Indigenous Focusing Oriented Therapy

IFOT brings the foundation of Indigenous Psychotherapy to Focusing Oriented Therapy (Gendlin, 1996), to address complex trauma experienced by Indigenous people and people of

colour in Canada and internationally. It is a part of a broad movement to widen Western and mainstream models of health and well-being by centering tools, practices and approaches that are strengths-based, culturally aligned and historically situated. IFOT was pioneered by Shirley Turcotte, RCC, over the course of three-decades, based on her clinical practice and her own healing from childhood sexual abuse as a Métis woman (Turcotte & Schiffer, 2014). Turcotte adapted Eugene Gendlin's Focusing Oriented Therapy (Gendlin 1996) to the collective, intergenerational, and land-based context of Indigenous communities. IFOT is decolonizing; it centrally attends to and challenges historical oppression at the root of complex trauma (Turcotte & Schiffer, 2014).

The collective, intergenerational, and land-based approach of IFOT differentiates it from Western forms of therapy. IFOT moves beyond the individual, to meet complex trauma from “all my relations”, an expression which encompasses the web of relationships in which a person is embedded. “All my relations”,

acknowledges our relationship to our ancestors, to the ancestral lands of our people, the places in which we have lived and where we have traveled to, to the plants and animals we have consumed and/or commodified, and to the people to whom we are connected, sometimes without ever meeting. (Shiffer & Turcotte, 2014, p. 51)

From this perspective, everything is animate, connected, and interconnected across time and space, through the generations, and so can be drawn upon for healing (Turcotte, 2012).

IFOT brings a collective lens to trauma therapy, understanding that complex trauma in an Indigenous context is deep and relational. An individual's experience of trauma may be layered with the experiences of their families and communities across generations, shaped by the aftermath of colonization, particularly of Indian Residential Schools and the child welfare

system. In IFOT, vicarious and intergenerational trauma is “both uniquely individual and inextricably collective” (Turcotte & Schiffer, 2014, p. 51). In this way, an individual’s trauma is not all theirs and they are not alone in their experience of it. The felt sense in IFOT is “a bodily experience of interconnected emotion, energy and sensations that are an expression of knowledge of collective experiences through time” (Turcotte & Schiffer, 2014, p. 51). This definition builds from Gendlin’s FOT, a model which explores the somatic experience of the client to engender therapeutic change. For Gendlin “a felt sense is the holistic, implicit bodily sense of a complex situation” (Gendlin, 1996, p. 58). A felt sense is distinguished from an emotion, it is less easily recognizable as maze of multiple meanings and facets. A felt sense has a certain bodily quality, it often contains emotions embedded in thoughts, observations, memories or desires. IFOT follows Gendlin’s six stages of focusing: clearing space, felt sense, handle, resonating, asking, and receiving (Gendlin, 1996). The collective lens is practically applied in IFOT; the felt sense is the connecting point to “all my relations”. In this way, conversations with ancestors, and with all beings the client is in relationship with, come through the body to support the therapeutic encounter (Turcotte & Schiffer, 2014).

IFOT is land-based, drawing on the Indigenous philosophy that relationship to the earth facilitates healing and wellness. IFOT locates trauma in “all my relations”, in space and in time, which involves “traumatic landscapes that may span generations” (Turcotte & Schiffer, 2014, p. 58), while remaining grounded in the present. IFOT leans into the land, based on the assumption that the land can hold the trauma and draws upon medicines for healing (Turcotte & Williams, 2018). The therapy room is set-up with the therapist and client not directly facing each other; the trauma story is directed to and held by the land. Medicines meaningful to the client are called

upon as their need arises. IFOT is foremost a ceremonial healing process, arising out of client-centered therapy which privileges the body and the spiritual (Turcotte, 2012).

IFOT is explicitly justice-centered and decolonizing in its approach, addressing the central role of oppression in complex trauma to drive the world to a better place. IFOT considers trauma from a strengths-based perspective that separates the experience of trauma from the individual. This holistic approach explores the feelings and symptoms present as they relate to the client's life as a whole and as they are connected in "all my relations" (Turcotte, 2012). In IFOT, the intergenerational, collective traumatic memory holds the decolonized knowing necessary to heal the past, present and future. Resilience is integral to the experience of oppression; trauma holds the wisdom necessary for healing (Turcotte & Schiffer, 2014).

Teachers of IFOT are people who have lived experience of oppression as Indigenous people or people of colour. The curriculum is holistic and always in flux; responding to the relationships present in the teachers and student body. Flexibility and adaptability in IFOT are intentions; they support the decolonizing principle and thwart appropriation. Non-Indigenous people are encouraged to learn the IFOT tools and engage in the work, however they are unable to teach it, because they lack the lived experience of oppression (Turcotte & Williams, 2018). IFOT has been taught in communities across Canada and internationally. Indigenous Tools for Living is a shorter workshop series delivered in communities.

IFOT is intentionally not a manualized or prescriptive therapeutic model. IFOT training instills in practitioners a particular orientation to the therapeutic process and brings alive the cultural context of the community in which it is embedded. Consequently, IFOT cannot be simply learned and practiced by practitioners who do not have a lived experience of oppression and have not undergone the year-long training immersion. The findings regarding the

mobilization of IFOT in the Wet'suwet'en Nation presented in this work are situated within the life-world of the Wet'suwet'en people and must be considered as such.

1.4 Problem Statement

The legacy of historical trauma in Indigenous communities is sustained by ineffective, inappropriate, and often under-funded programs and services (Adelson, 2005; Gone, 2009). Western, biomedical approaches have failed to provide appropriate and adequate mental health services to Canadian Indigenous peoples, resulting in the underuse of these services and proliferation of mental health challenges (Adelson, 2005). Importantly, dominant paradigms of health have neglected the Indigenous perspective, that values holism, spirituality, relationality, and connection to the natural world (Adelson, 2005; McCormick, 2008). Counselling and psychotherapy interventions in Indigenous communities that are reliant on theories and techniques rooted in the Western biomedical model risk cultural displacement and assimilation, compounding the trauma that has already been experienced (Duran & Duran, 1995; Gone, 2004). Research on mental health interventions that address historical trauma in Indigenous communities is nascent (Adelson, 2005; Bombay et al., 2009; McCormick, 2008; Stewart & Marshall, 2017).

The literature points to the need for community-based interventions that are rooted in cultural models of health and healing, and control of resources by Indigenous peoples (Stewart & Marshall, 2017). Research that is “inclusive, engaged and empowering” (Adelson, 2005, p. S59) is severely limited, necessitating decolonizing methodologies and research that engage in meaningful dialogue with communities (Adelson, 2005). Similarly, community capacity-building is needed to strengthen a community's own ability to respond to health issues. More promising approaches are “ground-up” and “from the inside” (White, 2007). Critically, “unless theory,

practice, and research are deeply rooted in the life-world metaphor of the culture, effectiveness will be limited at best and more trauma will occur at worst” (Duran & Firehammer, 2017 p. 122).

The OW is utilizing IFOT as the foundation of the wellness strategy for the Wet’suwet’en Nation. Healing from trauma is critical because of its far-reaching impacts on the level of individuals, families, communities, house groups, and the Nation as a whole. To support the OW wellness strategy, more understanding is necessary in regard to how IFOT is shaped by Wet’suwet’en ways of knowing and being and how it is mobilized at the level individuals, families, house groups and the Nation.

1.5 Rationale for the Study

The need for empirical research that is culturally relevant in the field of trauma in Indigenous communities has been widely documented (Adelson, 2005; Bombay et al., 2009). This study aims to address this gap. In collaboration with the OW, this research explores how IFOT is shaped by Wet’suwet’en ways of knowing and being and taken up by individuals, families, house groups, and the Nation. Following Wilson (2001), relationships make up Indigenous reality and research with Indigenous communities involves the ceremony of being accountable to these relationships. Consequently, our methodological approach and process is equally important to our research findings. Based upon Indigenous methodologies (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2010) and supported by narrative inquiry and analysis (Buchanan-Arvey, 2003; Riessman, 2008), data collection and analysis are embedded in Wet’suwet’en epistemologies.

1.6 Purpose

The purpose of the study is to explore how IFOT is shaped by Wet’suwet’en ways of knowing and being and how it is mobilized at the level of individuals, families, house groups, and the Nation. This research aims to support the OW in their use of IFOT, to bring health and

unity to the Wet'suwet'en people. Understanding the complexity of IFOT in the Wet'suwet'en context may inform the development of future wellness strategy.

1.7 Research Question

Given the rationale and purpose for this study, the research question asks: How is IFOT shaped by Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing and being and mobilized at the level of individuals, families, house groups, and the Nation?

1.8 Significance

This research provides an examination of how IFOT is shaped by Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing and being and mobilized at the level of individuals, families, house groups, and the Nation. I provide a local analysis of a decolonizing trauma therapy model. The methodology and methods used aimed to be decolonizing as well, following from a belief that the research process itself is an opportunity for reconciliation. This case-study may provide themes and understanding that can be transferable to the applicability of IFOT and other mental health and healing interventions in Indigenous communities across Canada.

1.9 Note on Terminology

The term *Wet'suwet'en* is used to refer to the original people of the Bulkley Valley. The term Wet'suwet'en was adopted as a replacement for *Carrier* in the 1970s by linguists Hank Hildebrandt and Gillian Story and was used in the *Delgamuukw-Gisdaywa v. British Columbia* court case. It was consequently the term utilized by the Office of the Wet'suwet'en. Beginning in the late 1980s, the term *Witsuwit'en*, suggested by linguist Sharon Hargus as a part of her extensive and ongoing study of the *Witsuwit'en* language, came into use and has been adopted by the Witsuwit'en Language and Culture Society and School District #54 (McCreary, 2018; Morin, 2016). Considering our collaboration with the OW on this research, we have decided to employ

the Wet'suwet'en spelling, while utilizing the Hargus written form of the language throughout the text. We have relied upon the translation of Ts'akë ze' Wilat, Sue Alfred and her daughter, Delores Alfred as well as the spelling used in Morin (2016).

The term *Indigenous* is used to designate original peoples. The term Indigenous recognizes that Indigenous peoples are a part of an international community and has taken on particular salience due to the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. In the Canadian context, Indigenous includes First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. I use the term Indigenous when referring to Indigenous peoples generically.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

This chapter provides a narrative literature review of Indigenous trauma intervention research in Canada. I begin by examining the mental health context of Indigenous peoples in Canada. I then explore Indigenous historical trauma and Indigenous wellness, and present identified areas for research and practice. I subsequently outline the narrative literature review approach utilized and the methodology employed. In terms of results, I examine research trends according to study participants, characteristics of interventions, and research design. Strengths and gaps in the literature base are explored as well as recommended future directions. I conclude with limitations of the narrative literature review.

2.1 Mental Health Context of Indigenous Peoples in Canada

In 2016, there were 1,673,785 Indigenous people in Canada making up 4.9% of the overall population. Since 2006, the Indigenous population grew by 42.5%, four times faster than the rest of the population (Statistics Canada, 2018). Despite the size and growth of the Indigenous population, the data on Indigenous peoples, especially off-reserve, is limited by their exclusion from and unidentifiability in health information systems and surveys as well as jurisdictional challenges that result in inconsistencies in data collection (Firestone et al., 2015). Indigenous people in Canada have a life expectancy 12 years lower than the national average and experience higher rates of preventable chronic diseases compared with non-Indigenous Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2011). In 2016, Statistics Canada reported that half of the children in foster care were Indigenous. Indigenous youth were particularly at risk for a mood disorder—11% of off-reserve First Nations youth and 7.8% of Métis youth reported having a mood disorder. Indigenous women were almost three times as likely as non-Indigenous women to be victims of a violent crime (Statistics Canada, 2018). Some of the most commonly experienced

mental challenges in Indigenous communities were suicide (particularly in youth), alcoholism, violence, and depression (Kirmayer et al., 2000). In a sample of residential school survivors, 64% were diagnosed with PTSD (Bombay et al., 2009; Brave Heart, 1998). Substance use and related harms have been identified as the top health priority by Indigenous communities. In 2003, 74% of on-reserve First Nations people rated alcohol and illegal drugs as their biggest health concerns. The rate of mortality due to alcohol related causes among Indigenous peoples was almost twice that of the general Canadian population (Firestone et al., 2015).

2.2 Indigenous Historical Trauma

The systematic historical erosion of the cultural, social, economic, and spiritual structures of Indigenous peoples, as well as continued contemporary oppression have created the context of historical trauma experienced by Indigenous peoples and their communities across Canada (Poonwassie, 2006; Stewart & Marshall, 2017). Psychological trauma is defined as the psychological, physical, and mental effects related to a painful, distressing, or shocking experience when an individual does not have the capacity to cope (Stewart & Marshall, 2017; Straussner & Calnan, 2014). Complex psychological trauma is described as:

Experiences that (1) are interpersonal and often involve betrayal; (2) are repetitive or prolonged; (3) involve direct harm through various forms of abuse (psychological/emotional, physical, and sexual), neglect, or abandonment by persons who are responsible for the care, protection or guidance of others, especially youngsters and offspring (such as parents, family caregivers, teachers, coaches, or religious advisors), or traumatic losses in those relationships; and (4) occur at developmentally vulnerable times in life, such as early childhood, or undermine important developmental attainments at any point in the lifespan. (Ford & Courtois, 2009, p. x)

These constructs inform historical trauma, the “cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences [...], the collective, complex trauma is inflicted over generations on a group of people who share a specific identify or affiliation” (Bombay et al., 2009, p. 23). Colonial processes that have contributed to historical trauma for Indigenous Canadians include: turning Indigenous peoples into wards of the state; imposing the federal reserve system to replace traditional systems of governance; providing inadequate services to those living on reserve; racist attitudes toward Indigenous peoples; obliging Indigenous peoples to forfeit ‘status’; and, removing Indigenous children from their families and communities as a part of the Indian Residential Schools and child protection systems (Adelson, 2005; Kollahdooz et al., 2015). The application of historical trauma to Indigenous peoples in Canada is drawn from research on the experience of Holocaust survivors and resulting transgenerational impacts (Brave Heart, 1998; Bombay et al., 2009). Studies have shown that the effects of trauma may be conveyed from Holocaust survivors to their children, similar to the transmission of culture and that the trauma exposure of preceding generations is formative to an individual’s experience of posttraumatic stress (Danieli, 1998, 2016). Transmitted effects can include predisposition to PTSD, general psychological stress, and insecure attachment styles (Bombay et al., 2009). Additional mental health concerns associated with psychological trauma are depression, panic disorders, posttraumatic stress disorder, sleep disorders, and substance abuse disorders (van der Kolk, 2014). Trauma can cause disorganized thinking and awareness, impaired judgement, slower reaction time, unhelpful coping and hypervigilance. Trauma often results in socioeconomic disadvantages and maladaptive parenting styles, which contribute to intergenerational effects (Bombay et al., 2009; Straussner & Calnan, 2014). For trauma survivors, the world is

unpredictable and unstable. Survivors exhibit a sense of disempowerment, helpless in the face of their future (Straussner & Calnan, 2014).

It is difficult to disentangle the effects of historical trauma from the everyday experiences of marginalized people living in poverty. Contemporary health and social conditions experienced by Indigenous peoples, together with persistent discrimination, are a continuation of historical traumas (Bombay et al., 2009; Kirmayer et al., 2008). According to Bombay et al., (2009), “poor well-being may reflect the direct actions of current events, the direct or indirect effects attributable to traumatic experiences in previous generations, or the synergy between the two” (p. 13). Duran and Duran (1995) proposed a language for trauma which reflects an Indigenous perspective, referring to trauma a “soul wound”. Duran and Firehammer (2017) elaborated on soul wounding as “injury where blood does not flow” (p. 107), underscoring historical trauma as destructive to the life world of a people.

2.3 Indigenous Wellness

There is wide diversity among Indigenous peoples and no single Indigenous worldview; however, there are more similarities between Indigenous groups than there are differences, and some generalizations can be useful in distinguishing Indigenous from Western worldviews (Hart, 2016; McCormick, 2008). A worldview is defined as the way in which “a person perceives his or her relationship to the world” (Sue & Sue, 2003, p. 267), structuring an individual’s attitudes, values, opinions and concepts, and how they think, understand events and make decisions (Sue & Sue, 2003). Indigenous worldviews, according to Hart (2016) and Wilson (2008), find value in collectivism, balance with the natural world, present time orientation, relationship to family and community, belonging in community, land, and cosmology, non-verbal communication, spirit as inseparable from body and mind, and belief in the goodness of human nature. Non-dualistic

thinking and relationality are central; the wellness of the individual is intimately tied to the wellness of the community and the natural world. The phrase, ‘all my relations’, emphasizes that everything is connected and moving toward balance of mind, body, spirit and heart (Hart, 2016; Wilson, 2008).

Within these worldviews, Indigenous wellness is conceptualized as an active, forward moving process of healing (Stewart, 2008). Indigenous wellness is holistic, acknowledging the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of a person in connection to family and community (Adelson, 2005). One model of Indigenous wellness is the medicine wheel, reflecting the interconnectedness and balance of the mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical aspects of health. These four realms represent the four directions, acknowledging the relationship between health, place, belonging, and the natural world, and the balance that exists between all things. Within this understanding, illness stems from imbalance and mental health concerns must be addressed in a holistic way (Czyzewski, 2011; Kirmayer et al., 2008; McCormick, 2008; Stewart & Marshall, 2017). The individual is understood as embedded within a web of relationships of family, clan, ancestors, animals, natural world, and spiritual world. Relationship and interdependence are central to health (Czyzewski, 2011; Stewart & Marshall, 2017). Healing, from an Indigenous perspective, is helping people to understand their belonging in the overall cosmology, including social, natural and spiritual worlds (Duran et al., 2008). Spirituality acknowledges another dimension of meaning, beyond the individual psyche and social world, that a person can feel connected to, bringing a sense of calm, clarity and purpose. Relationship to the land is marked by custodianship, looking after the land for the benefit of the people and the land itself. The strong sense of place that distinguishes many Indigenous traditions recognizes that connection to land has spiritual, ethical, esthetic, and historical dimensions and is central to

resilience (Kirmayer et al., 2008). Indigenous comprehensive understandings of wellness that value holism, relationality, spirituality, and connection to the land translate poorly into the individualism and secular humanism of the Western, biomedical context of care (Duran & Duran, 1995; Hart, 2016; McCormick, 2012, 2008).

2.4 Identified Areas for Research and Practice

The need for empirical research that is collaborative and culturally relevant in the field of trauma and mental health with Indigenous communities has been widely documented (Adelson, 2005; Bombay et al., 2009). Existing research on general mental health interventions with Indigenous peoples points to the indelible link between cultural continuity¹ and positive health outcomes (Bombay et al., 2009; Chandler & Lalonde, 2008), the need for community-based interventions that are rooted in cultural models of health and healing, and control of resources by Indigenous peoples (Stewart & Marshall, 2017). Research that is “inclusive, engaged and empowering” (Adelson, 2005, p. S59) is severely limited, necessitating decolonizing methodologies and research that engages in meaningful dialogue with communities (Adelson, 2005). Decolonizing methodologies and trauma interventions entail addressing oppression and colonization. Decolonization is aimed at criticizing and challenging colonialism, legitimizing Indigenous knowledge, and centering liberating healing practices (Duran et al., 2008). Similarly, community capacity-building is needed to strengthen a community’s own ability to respond to health issues. More promising approaches are “ground-up” and “from the inside” (White, 2007). Critically, “unless theory, practice, and research are deeply rooted in the life-world metaphor of

¹ Cultural continuity describes community level variables which document the preservation of culture and self-determination (Chandler & Lalonde, 2008). Signs of cultural continuity are land claims, self-government, education services, police and fire services, health services, and cultural facilities. The prevalence of cultural continuity in Indigenous communities has been strongly related to lower incidences of youth suicide. Despite high statistical data regarding Indigenous youth suicide, youth suicide was not equivalent across Indigenous communities; those communities marked by cultural continuity proved to have less suicide. In particular, communities with some form of self-government were associated with the lowest rates of youth suicide (Chandler & Lalonde, 2008).

the culture, effectiveness will be limited at best and more trauma will occur at worst” (Duran & Firehammer, 2017 p. 122).

2.5 A Narrative Review of the Literature

A preliminary search of the literature was conducted to develop the design of the present review. This preliminary search established that there have been very few empirical studies on trauma interventions with Indigenous peoples that are culturally appropriate. There have been two systematic reviews conducted on psychotherapy research with Indigenous communities (Pomerville et al., 2016, $n = 20$; Drawson et al., 2016, $n = 9$). These reviews focused on studies based in the United States that targeted suicide prevention, substance use disorders, anxiety and depression, general mental health, and trauma and PTSD ($n = 10$). All studies reviewed included integration of Indigenous and Western approaches to psychotherapy. There has been one systematic review of trauma interventions in Indigenous communities in the United States and Canada that compiled 15 studies representing 10 interventions (Gameon & Skewes, 2020). This review consolidated culturally adapted and culturally grounded trauma interventions, including three Canadian studies. To date, there have been no systematic literature reviews related to trauma interventions in the Canadian context only, which is distinct considering the Canadian history of colonization and the current climate of reconciliation following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Women. The purpose of this chapter was to explore the research literature that utilized culturally appropriate trauma interventions with Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Following from the aim of the present chapter, research questions were developed to structure the literature review process.

- What are themes and trends in the literature on trauma interventions with Indigenous peoples in Canada in terms of: (a) study participants, (b) type of interventions, (c) highlights of findings, and (e) research design.
- What are the strengths and gaps in the literature base?
- What are the recommended future directions and opportunities for growth in the area of trauma interventions with Indigenous peoples from an Indigenous approach in Canada?

2.6 Methodology

A narrative literature review method was followed considering its comprehensive approach and ability to consolidate the existing literature into a unified story about culturally appropriate trauma interventions with Indigenous peoples in Canada (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Green et al., 2006; Record-Lemon & Buchanan, 2017). Themes identified in the literature can be helpful to distinguish strengths, gaps, and recommended future directions and opportunities for growth in the research area (Green et al., 2006). Methodological guidelines (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Green et al., 2006) were consulted for the present review to establish the following steps: (a) guided keyword search utilizing computerized databases, (c) reference list search of articles found through keyword search, and (c) examination of the literature base according to relevance, duplication, and inclusion/exclusion criteria.

2.6.1 Procedures

2.6.1.1 Guided Computerized Database Search

The following databases were searched for the present literature review: The University of British Columbia Library, Google Scholar, Academic Search Complete, Education Source, PsychARTICLES, PsychINFO, ERIC, and the Wiley Online Library. Keywords utilized in this search included combinations of trauma, Indigenous, and therapy key words including: "trauma,"

“posttraumatic stress,” “historical trauma,” “intergenerational trauma,” “Indigenous,” “Aboriginal,” “First Nation,” “Inuit,” “Métis,” “counselling,” “psychotherapy,” “therapy,” “intervention,” and “Canada”.

2.6.1.2 Reference List Search

The reference lists of the articles obtained through the literature search were scanned for cited articles that were relevant to the present literature review. The articles were then found by searching computerized databases including EBSCO databases and Google Scholar.

2.6.1.3 Literature Set Examination

The literature set was examined for relevance by reading the article abstracts for matches with the present study’s keywords and by ensuring that journals were peer-reviewed. Duplicate studies were removed. Following these initial criteria, the articles were more thoroughly examined according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria. These guidelines were established to identify the full range of empirical studies on culturally appropriate trauma intervention research with Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Inclusion criteria for the present study were: (a) empirical investigations that employed clearly delineated methodology, (b) studies conducted in Canada, (c) studies conducted with Indigenous individuals or communities, (d) culturally appropriate trauma interventions, (e) focused on trauma or posttraumatic stress, (f) published in peer-reviewed journals or dissertations, and (g) published in the English language.

Exclusion criteria for the present study were: (a) non-empirical and theoretical articles, (b) studies conducted outside of Canada, (c) studies not conducted with Indigenous individuals or communities, (d) interventions that did not utilize a culturally appropriate approach, (e) not

focused on trauma or posttraumatic stress, (f) not published in peer-reviewed journals or dissertations, and (g) not written in or translated into English.

2.7 Results

Records identified during database and manual searching yielded 162 results. Non-empirical articles ($n = 119$), master's theses ($n = 4$), duplicates ($n = 22$), and articles with a non-Indigenous focus ($n = 6$) were excluded. The remaining nine articles and two dissertations were examined for themes based on the criteria outlined above. The eleven documents found encompassed 8 interventions (see Table 1). The two dissertations (Linklater, 2012; Shrigley 2019) were included because of direct relevance to the research questions. Though the dissertations did not examine unique interventions, they provided a broad analysis of trauma interventions from the perspective of Indigenous clients and mental health professionals.

The dates of publication ranged from 2000 to 2019. The majority of the studies ($n = 8$) were published in the last ten years, between 2010 and 2020. The articles were published in a range of peer-reviewed journals across the fields of community psychology, clinical psychology, counselling, Indigenous policy, addictions, mental health, and Indigenous mental health.

2.7.1 Research Trends

2.7.1.1 Study Participants

Participants in these studies included adult self-identified Indigenous clients, counsellors, traditional healers, traditional counsellors, and program administrators. Four studies took place on-reserve, three studies occurred in urban settings, and one study included Indigenous healthcare practitioners from across Canada, including two participants from the United States. All clients, counsellors, and administrators who were participants in the studies self-identified as Indigenous, including Algonquian (Gone 2011, 2009), Ojibway (Heilbron), Anishnaabe (Marsh

et al., 2018, 2016; Linklater, 2011; Reeves & Stewart 2017, 2014; Shrigley, 2019), Métis, Cree, Tlaxcaltec, Dakota Sioux, Mohawk, and Cree Métis (Linklater, 2011). Two studies did not specify the cultural group of their participants (Thomas & Bellefeuille, 2006; Thomas et al., 2013). The majority of the interventions researched occurred in Ontario ($n = 7$), one study was conducted in Manitoba, and one in British Columbia. Sample sizes were small across studies, varying from 3 to 19 participants.

2.7.1.2 Characteristics of Interventions

All studies described the integration of Indigenous and Western approaches to trauma interventions. Integration included: ayahuasca ceremony and Western group therapy for addiction and stress (Thomas et al., 2016), focusing oriented therapy and healing circles (Thomas & Bellefeuille, 2006), “Seeking Safety”, a Western treatment model, and the medicine wheel, sharing circles, and multiple additional Indigenous healing practices (Marsh et al., 2016, 2018), psychoeducational lectures about trauma and colonization, the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, and community-based activities, rituals, sweat lodges, and diverse other Indigenous and Western therapeutic modalities (Gone, 2009, 2011), and sweat lodge ceremonies and Western psychotherapy (Reeves & Stewart, 2014). Multiple interventions included facilitation by traditional healers and elders alongside counsellors (Gone, 2009, 2011; Marsh et al., 2016, 2018; Thomas et al., 2016; Reeves & Stewart, 2014). In Thomas et al., 2016, a Peruvian Ayahuasquero facilitated the ayahuasca ceremony. In Marsh et al., (2016), traditional healers and elders led sweat lodge ceremonies, drumming, sharing circles and other cultural activities. In Reeves and Stewart (2014), elders acted as advisors for the development of the intervention. In Gone (2009, 2011), elders and traditional healers were integrated throughout the outpatient program. Additional culturally rooted intervention characteristics included: use of the medicine wheel

(Gone 2009, 2011; Linklater, 2011; Marsh et al., 2016, 2018; Shrigley, 2019; Thomas & Bellefeuille, 2006), healing circles or group therapy (Gone, 2009, 2011; Heilbron, 2000; Reeves & Stewart, 2014; Marsh et al., 2018; 2016; Shrigley, 2019; Thomas et al., 2016; Thomas & Bellefeuille, 2006), sweat lodge ceremonies (Gone, 2009, 2011; Marsh et al., 2016, 2018), smudging and use of traditional medicines (Gone 2009, 2011; Heilbron & Guttman, 2000; Linklater, 2011; Marsh et al., 2016, 2018; Reeves & Stewart, 2017; Shrigley, 2019; Thomas et al., 2016) and a holistic approach (Gone 2009, 2011; Linklater, 2011; Marsh et al., 2016, 2018; Reeves & Stewart, 2017; Shrigley, 2019; Thomas & Bellefeuille; Thomas et al., 2016). Psychoeducation related to trauma, addictions, and colonization was another intervention characteristic (Gone, 2009, 2001; Marsh et al., 2016, 2018), as well as the “talking cure” approach of verbally sharing personal traumatic experiences to a counsellor or in a group (Gone, 2009, 2011; Heilbron & Guttman, 2000; Linklater, 2011; Marsh et al., 2016; Reeves & Stewart, 2017; Thomas & Bellefeuille, 2006).

2.7.1.3 Outcomes Reported

All studies reported that participants experienced a strengthening of their Indigenous identities due to the interventions which were central to healing. Primary to culturally appropriate trauma interventions for participants was an increased understanding of historical trauma alongside an improved sense of personal empowerment and self-determination (Gone 2009, 2011; Linklater 2011; Marsh et al., 2016, 2018; Shrigley, 2019; Reeves & Stewart, 2017). Connection to spirituality was identified as a key aspect of interventions’ effectiveness (Linklater, 2011; Reeves & Stewart 2016; Shrigley, 2019; Thomas & Bellefeuille, 2006;). The collective aspect of interventions, through healing circles, and relationships with counsellors, traditional healer, and other clients helped participants to develop trust (Heilbron & Guttman,

2000; Marsh et al., 2018; Shrigley, 2019; Thomas & Bellefeuille, 2006). Participants reported that regaining trust in self and in connection to others was a result of interventions (Marsh et al., 2018). The trauma experienced by participants was described as a colonial wound (Reeves & Stewart, 2017), in terms of loss (Reeves & Stewart, 2017), and emphasized the depth of the emotional burdens that survivors carry (Gone, 2011). Shrigley (2019) noted the complexity of healing from intergenerational trauma and Gone (2011) identified the ongoing healing journey in which trauma interventions are embedded. Throughout the studies examined, individual healing was embedded in community healing and holistic approaches addressed interconnectedness.

2.7.1.4 Research design

The majority of the studies utilized qualitative methodologies, and two studies (Marsh et al., 2016; Thomas et al., 2016) undertook a mixed-methods approach. In-depth interviews, sharing circles, focus groups, and open-ended evaluations were employed to collect data. Indigenous methodologies highlighted guidance from elders and Indigenous organizations, cultural ethics and protocols, and storytelling (Linklater, 2011; Shrigley, 2019; Reeves & Stewart, 2014, 2017). More recent studies contextualized their research approach within decolonizing methodologies (Gone, 2009; Marsh et al., 2016, 2018; Reeves & Stewart, 2017; Shrigley, 2019). Reeves & Stewart (2017) described the decolonizing intent of their research as seeking “to honour Indigenous knowledges and epistemologies, promote community healing using Indigenous methods, and frame client mental health issues as belonging to larger structural inequities” (p. 35). Gone (2009) emphasized that the research’s “decolonization efforts” were “culturally grounded” and “community-based” (p. 760) and advocated for bridging Evidenced Based Treatment with Culturally Sensitive Treatment as a way for psychologists to serve Indigenous communities. Marsh et al. (2016, 2018) described their decolonizing approach in

terms of its critical evaluation of methodology, ethics and culturally acceptable practices. All studies involved collaboration with Indigenous organizations, located both on- and off-reserve. Approval was sought from organization administration, Elders, and band leaders. The interpretation of results across the studies involved thematic analysis conducted by researchers. The authors of several studies positioned themselves in relation to their research (Heilbron, 2000; Linklater, 2011; Reeves & Stewart, 2014; Shrigley, 2019; Thomas et al., 2016).

2.8 Strengths and Gaps in the Literature Base

The purpose of this chapter was to explore current studies regarding culturally appropriate trauma interventions in Indigenous communities in Canada. 11 studies were identified representing seven interventions utilized to treat trauma that highlighted the emerging literature base on this topic. The studies examined reflect local approaches to helping community members to heal from trauma. Interventions were embedded in Indigenous organizations, and facilitated by Indigenous administrators, Elders, traditional healers, and Indigenous counsellors. Community protocols were followed both in implementing interventions and throughout the research process. Interventions were founded upon key aspects of Indigenous worldviews, namely: holism, relationality, spirituality, and connection to the land. Considering the preponderance of interventions studied that were conducted in Ontario, there is an additional need for research representing Indigenous communities across Canada. All interventions studied were conducted with adults. There remains a need for interventions and research to be conducted with children/youth and families. Considering the intergenerational impacts of trauma and the collective, familial orientation of Indigenous worldviews, interventions with children/youth and families represent a distinct gap. Participants reported a general improvement in symptoms

related to trauma, however, small sample sizes, lack of comparison groups, and limited follow-up protocols may limit the generalizability of these findings.

More recent studies were situated within Indigenous and decolonizing methodologies and were conducted to benefit the communities themselves. Qualitative or mixed method approaches that utilized storytelling with a relational focus aligned well with Indigenous worldviews. Researchers were responsible for the interpretation of results across studies examined, typically through thematic analysis. Despite the rigor visible in research approaches, there is opportunity to expand and articulate what is meant by Indigenous methodologies and decolonizing methodologies and to employ more extensive participatory approaches that allow the participants additional power and voice throughout the research process.

2.9 Recommended Future Directions

Given the mental health burdens experienced by Indigenous peoples due to higher rates of PTSD and lack of adequate mental health care (McIntyre et al., 2017), there is an urgent need to expand trauma interventions in Indigenous communities and the literature base that explores their effectiveness. Indigenous communities are requesting interventions that are culturally adapted or grounded, and the resources to conduct their own research to better facilitate community healing (Adelson, 2005; Stewart & Marshall, 2017). In particular, interventions are needed that target children/youth and families and represent the diversity of Indigenous communities from across Canada. Morrisette and Goodwill (2013) provided recommendations for stages of intervention to assist Indian residential school survivors in the formal disclosure process involved in the TRC which may be useful to consider for future interventions. Survivor engagement and validation highlight the need for empathic listening, consideration of systemic implications, and recognition of diversity amongst Indigenous groups. Therapeutic socialization

and intervention clarification entail a collaborative therapeutic stance. Finally, abuse identification and clarification assist survivors in articulating their experience of abuse and its meaning in their lives. Trauma interventions in Canadian Indigenous communities may benefit from these recommendations.

2.10 Limitations

The small number of trauma intervention studies identified in this review allowed for a discussion of the approaches to trauma intervention research but not an evaluation of the efficacy or effectiveness of these interventions. There were limitations regarding the search strategy used. Despite efforts to identify all published empirical studies of trauma interventions in Indigenous communities in Canada, some studies may have been missed due to search term limitations. The inclusion of “peer-reviewed empirical articles” could overlook studies with Indigenous communities who may be implementing their own trauma interventions but not publishing the findings. Thus, expanding the search criteria to find non-published, community-based trauma interventions could offer additional insight pertaining to how Indigenous communities are conducting their own research.

2.11 Conclusion

This chapter has provided the context in the literature for the present research regarding the implementation of IFOT with the Wet’suwet’en Nation. Contemporary Indigenous mental health research is beginning to address colonization, contextualizing Indigenous health within a history of colonial relationships and inadequate mental health responses. In practice, however, dominant counselling models for mental health in Canada have neglected the Indigenous perspective and there is a paucity of research regarding interventions that address psychological trauma with Indigenous populations. 11 Canadian studies were identified that employed

culturally appropriate trauma interventions in Indigenous communities. The findings were discussed in relation to the study participants, outcomes reported, and research design. Recommendations were provided to address the need for evidence-based trauma interventions that have efficacy for Indigenous people in Canada to address Indigenous historical trauma. The present study seeks to address these recommendations.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This research project, evaluating how Indigenous Focusing Oriented Therapy (IFOT) is shaped by Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing and being and mobilized at the level of individuals, families, house groups, and the Nation followed an Indigenous methodologies framework supported by narrative inquiry and collaborative narrative analysis. Pairing Indigenous methodologies with Western approaches to research, in this way, can help to infuse Indigenous knowledges within the academy (Kovach, 2010). I begin this chapter by expanding upon the purpose of the research and the research questions. I then elaborate on my methodological framework, outlining decolonizing research, the principles of Indigenous methodologies, and narrative inquiry. Following, I discuss the research design including sampling and recruitment, participants, data collection, data analysis, representation of findings, ethical considerations, and finally, trustworthiness of findings.

3.1 Purpose of the Research

The purpose of the research was to explore how IFOT is shaped by Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing and being and mobilized at the level of individuals, families, house groups, and the Nation. This research aimed to support the Office of the Wet'suwet'en (OW) in their use of IFOT to bring health and unity to their people. Understanding the complexity of IFOT in the Wet'suwet'en context may inform the integration of trauma therapy approaches in the Wit'suwit'en community. IFOT is becoming well-known and widely taught throughout the Northwest BC, Canada, and internationally. Despite its community salience, IFOT has not been explored empirically. The need for empirical research that is collaborative and culturally relevant regarding Indigenous trauma interventions has been documented (Adelson, 2005; Bombay et al., 2009; McCormick, 2008; Stewart & Marshall, 2017). This research aimed to address this gap,

contributing decolonizing research that supported an Indigenous, community-based, trauma intervention. The purpose of research was not to provide a manual for carrying out IFOT. IFOT instills in practitioners an orientation to the therapeutic process that is rooted in the cultural context in which it is embedded. Consequently, the findings presented in this research are intended to highlight how IFOT is mobilized in the Wet'suwet'en context and situated within the life-world of the Wet'suwet'en people.

3.2 Research Question

The research question asked: How is IFOT shaped by Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing and being and mobilized at the level of individuals, families, house groups, and the Nation?

3.3 Methodology

My methodology was rooted in Indigenous methodologies and informed by narrative inquiry and analysis. The choice of methodology was, as Kovach (2017) described, “a political act” (p. 215). My aim was that this research project be decolonizing. Decolonizing methodologies are concerned with how research is conceptualized and designed, and the implications of research for participants and their communities. A decolonizing approach asks whether the research contributes to the oppression and colonization of Indigenous peoples (Smith, 2013). Decolonizing research inquires— who is asking the questions, what are they asking, and how (Smith, 2013). Max (2005) elaborated on decolonizing methodologies in her description of anti-colonial research as “initiated, directed, and controlled by Aboriginal peoples” (p. 79). Research must benefit those involved (Max, 2005). Decolonizing research “begins with the concerns of Indigenous people. It is assessed in terms of the benefits it creates for them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 2). In addition, McCabe (2017) specified that work that is emotionally healing, as well as an academic exercise, could have a decolonizing influence.

Importantly, decolonizing research requires critical reflection about the Western gaze: “If Indigenous research is to have decolonizing aspirations, it must make one think deeply, feel strongly. It ought to unsettle” (Kovach, 2017, p. 217).

I intended that this research be decolonizing, particularly that it be supportive of Wet’suwet’en individuals, families, house groups, and Nation in ways that they determined. In practice, this meant being guided by an advisory group of Hereditary Chiefs, being responsive to participant feedback, using sharing circles and storytelling as data collection methods, and relying on the participant group to interpret their own stories. This study provided a Wet’suwet’en analysis of a decolonizing therapeutic approach that was rooted in Wet’suwet’en ways of knowing and being. My own positionality as a non-Indigenous researcher unambiguously shaped and was shaped by this process.

3.3.1 Indigenous Methodologies

Indigenous methodologies are not prescriptive; rather they encourage a certain sensibility: “Indigenous methodologies require exploration of identity, an ability to be vulnerable, a desire for restitution, and an opening to awakenings” (Kovach, 2017, p. 218). The four R’s of Indigenous research, respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001), provided the principles that grounded our research. *Our* denotes the research relationship in which I worked collaboratively with Wet’suwet’en partners. These principles are interrelated and enacted in relationships. Respect entails feeling or showing honor and esteem for someone or something and acknowledges all aspects of Creation. Responsibility is the accountability that underlies “all our relations”. An individual is responsible to self, family, community, nation, the natural world, and the spiritual world (Hoffman, 2013). Archibald (2008) elaborated on respect and responsibility as, “respect for each other as human beings; respect and

responsibility for the power of cultural knowledge, and respect and responsibility for cultural protocol, for the honoring the authority and expertise of the Elder teacher” (Archibald, 2008, p. 6). Respect and responsibility involve trust and being culturally worthy, which relates to a readiness to fully absorb cultural knowledge (Archibald, 2008). Reciprocity is the harmony established with “all our relations” and enacted through protocols, ceremonies and rituals (Hoffman, 2013). Reciprocity is about giving-back, affirming relationships, sharing, and being of service. Reciprocity is inherent to storytelling, where the speaker and listener engage together in performing the story (Archibald, 2008; Archibald & Parent, 2019). Relevance relates to whether the research project is meaningful to the participants and community involved. Historically, research has served to oppress Indigenous peoples rather than be of benefit to them. In Indigenous methodologies, research provides a means for Indigenous peoples and communities to challenge the social, political, and economic conditions which contribute to ill health and lack of opportunities (Smith, 2013).

I follow from Kovach (2006; 2010) and Archibald (2008) to outline our methodological approach which centered “research as storytelling” (Archibald, 2008, p. 7). Story is a relational process at the center of research, aligning with Indigenous worldviews that value orality and storytelling. Storytelling is inherently relational and reciprocal (Kovach, 2010). Storytelling is characterized as an open-ended interview where both sides engage in talking. The researcher holds responsibilities; she must listen well and check understanding. The relationship between storyteller and researcher is “based on respect for each other, respect for the traditional cultural ways of teaching and learning, and reverence for spirituality” (Archibald, 2008, p. 10).

Wet’suwet’en worldviews grounded our methodology (Hart 2016; Hoffman, 2013). The Wet’suwet’en advisory group co-created the research process. Data collection and interpretation

occurred through a sharing circle process which prioritized storytelling and Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing and being. Participants, the advisory group, and the hereditary chiefs of the OW approved the thesis prior to its completion. Wet'suwet'en collaboration throughout the process helped ensure reciprocity, respect, and meaningful outcomes for the community.

The role of non-Indigenous people in engaging in Indigenous methodologies is complex. Steinhauer (2002) questioned the involvement of non-Indigenous peoples in conducting Indigenous methodologies, arguing that they lack the experiential knowledge of relationality required. Further, Steinhauer reasoned that their participation would perpetuate research conducted *on* Indigenous peoples: "If an Indigenous research methodology is about Indigenous reality, then how could this methodology be used by anyone other than an Indigenous person?" (Steinhauer, 2002, p. 72). For Kovach (2010), on the other hand, non-Indigenous researchers can engage in Indigenous methodologies provided they follow appropriate frameworks. Throughout the research process, I sought to respect Indigenous methodologies and engage in the research as an ally. My role as researcher was shaped by being an academic and an outsider and my own reflexivity and transparency was critical. I continually checked my understandings with participants and the advisory group to ensure that they were commensurate with Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing. I debriefed the research process with both the advisory group and participants to assess the extent to which they felt their voices were meaningfully heard and that the research might bring benefit to their community. As Kovach (2017) described, the research did, at times, unsettle both myself and participants. The research process illuminated for me the extent to which Wet'suwet'en participants' worldviews are deeply and fundamentally entwined with their *yintah*, in ways that I, as a non-Indigenous settler, can only faintly grasp. I consequently agree, in part, with Steinhauer's (2002) assertion about the lack of experiential knowledge of relationality

inherent in non-Indigenous researchers. Still, it is my belief that for reconciliation to occur, non-Indigenous people must play a role in research with Indigenous communities, though their strict adherence to Indigenous methodological frameworks is critical.

3.3.2 Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry supported our methodological approach. Narrative inquiry “is grounded in the study of the particular” (Radley & Chamberlain, 2001, p. 331) and examines “how reality is co-constructed, dialogical, relational, contextual, and partial” (Buchanan-Arvay, 2003, p. 163). In narrative inquiry, the investigator is interested in the ways a speaker or writer organizes events and uses language to relay meaning. Narrative inquiry is rooted in social constructionism and post-structuralism (Buchanan-Arvay, 2003), and is a cross-disciplinary with “many layered expression of human thought and imagination” (Riessman, 2008, p. 13). A narrative is produced when, “in everyday oral storytelling, a speaker connects events into a sequence that is consequential for later action and for the meanings that the speaker wants listeners to take away from the story” (Riessman, 2008, p. 3). Riessman (2008) refers to the social role of narratives; they do political work and are connected to how power functions in society. Meanings vary depending on the social context and power relations present in those interactions (Buchanan-Arvay, 2003). Narratives can motivate social change; civil rights and other resistance movements of the last century were mobilized when people gathered and shared stories about discrimination (Riessman, 2008).

In narrative inquiry, the researcher co-constructs the narrative and its meaning alongside participants. Together they create a climate that fosters storytelling, with the goal of collaboratively generating detailed narratives:

All narratives are, in a fundamental sense, co-constructed. The audience, whether physically present or not, exerts a crucial influence on what can and cannot be said, how things should be expressed, what can be taken for granted, what needs explaining, and so on. We now recognize that the professional account, in research interviews, which has traditionally been seen as the expression of a single subjectivity, is in fact always a co-construction. (Salmon, in Reissman, 2008, p. 31)

Reflexivity is integral to narrative inquiry. Reflexivity involves examining the process of the researcher, how power relations impact the relationships involved in research, and the narratives that are produced (Buchanan-Arvey, 2003). Reflexivity is “being conscientious of, and transparent about, the impact of my own history, biases, and assumptions on what and how I know, think, and write” (White, 2007, p. 215).

Inherent to narrative inquiry is encouraging extended narration by each unique participant, requiring the investigator to release a level of control. This can shift the power disparity that exists, though relations of power will never be equal. Consequently, reciprocity in the interview is critical, realized through the interviewer’s emotional attentiveness and engagement. Listening attentively is complex; being emotionally attentive and engaged exposes the researcher to vulnerability. The researcher may encounter new frameworks of meaning, necessitating the acknowledgement and relinquishment of their own identities to enter the world of the other (Reissman, 2008). With the foundation of Wet’suwet’en worldviews and Indigenous methodologies, narrative inquiry was helpful in elaborating on concepts of relationality, reflexivity, flexibility, and purposefulness.

3.4 Research Design

Indigenous methodologies require methods that are congruent with Indigenous worldviews and rely on the assumption that knowledge is relational (Wilson, 2001). Our methods included the use of sharing circles made up of Wet'suwet'en participants for data collection and analysis. Sharing circles, as described by Lavallée (2007), are founded on sharing by participants wherein the facilitator is given permission to report on what is shared. Sharing circles are spiritual, non-judgmental, respectful, and supportive. Sharing circles acknowledge the energy that is created by the group of participants through interconnectedness.

3.4.1 Sampling and Inclusion Criteria

The research sample consisted of 11 participants. Inclusion criteria were: Wet'suwet'en membership; completion of IFOT Diploma, and; diversity within the sample (representation of male and female participants, from different communities, living on and off Wet'suwet'en territory, who are Chiefs, front-line staff, and community leaders). The advisory group selected the participants and extended an invitation to join the project. I then had an introductory meeting with participants to discuss their involvement, review verbal and written informed consent, and schedule the sharing circle process (M. Buchanan, personal communication, January 10, 2020). The advisory group decided that they would also be included as participants in the research, given their expertise as Hereditary Chiefs and IFOT practitioners.

3.4.2 Participants

the four hereditary chiefs who made up the advisory group.

3.4.2.1 Ts'akë ze' Wilat

Ts'akë ze' Wilat, Sue Alfred, has been a Hereditary Chief for many, many years. Previously, she carried the name G'itan, now held by her daughter, Marjory Dumont. She is from

the *Tsayu* Clan and *Tsakinyih*, Beaver House. She is a mother to five children, grandmother to six, and great grandmother to five. She is fluent in the Wet'suwet'en language and has been working on language and traditional ways revitalization since the 1970's. Alongside a 35-year career at the Smithers Hospital, she worked for 45 years as a bookkeeper for a local fundraising organization. She was deeply involved in the *Delamuukw-Gisday'wa* court case, supporting her husband who was one of the plaintiffs and her parents who commissioned evidence for the case. Ts'akë ze' Wilat carried out the cultural audit of the IFOT training.

3.4.2.2 Dinī ze' Madeek

Dinī ze' Madeek, Jeff Brown, received the name in 2003, after his brother James passed away. Being a hereditary chief has been a rich learning experience for Dinī ze' Madeek. He has learned a lot about the territory and the history. He looked after the Woos and Gisday'wa houses for a number of years, until the names were lifted. Dinī ze' Madeek is vice-president of the Office of the Wet'suwet'en (OW), he sits on the board of ANBIP as well as the hiring committee, and he is a member of the executive committee board. Dinī ze' Madeek was trained in IFOT.

3.4.2.3 Dinī ze' Neekupdeh

Dinī ze' Neekupdeh, Daren George, is a wing chief for the House of the Flat Rocks. As spokesperson for the house, he was mentored by Henry Alfred, Dinī ze' Wah Tah Keg'ht, for many years. Dinī ze' Neekupdeh was born off-reserve. His early teachers were his grandfather, Thomas George, late Gisday'wa, and his grandmothers, the late Tsebesa, and Get. He was raised on the trapline, on the territory. Dinī ze' Neekupdeh has been working with Rising Above Counselling Agency for the last 15 years, where he addresses the abuse issues of First Nations'

peoples, including, residential school, grief, father/mother wounds and forgiveness. He has been trained in many approaches, including IFOT.

3.4.2.4 Dinī ze’ Smogelgem

Dinī ze’ Smogelgem, Warner Naziel, is Head Chief of the Sun House of the *Likhts’amisyu* Clan. Dinī ze’ Smogelgem has a history of working as a trauma counselor with Gitxsan and Wet’suwet’en youth in the 1990’s and received his formal training originally from the Justice Institute of BC. Today, the IFOT course gives him a more calculated approach to helping people deal with trauma and the tools learned in IFOT help keep us grounded in our own people’s spirituality and beliefs. For Dinī ze’ Smogelgem, at first there was hesitation because of the fear that a pan-Indian approach to the methodologies was going to impact what seemed natural to him as Wet’suwet’en. However, as the course material evolved so did the approach and people were encouraged to adapt some of the methodologies to suit their people’s traditional ways. IFOT helps him today by allowing him to control the amount of trauma that is released and gives him the necessary space to help clients gently use some of the same tools and methods on their own.

3.4.2.5 Jeremy Dumont

Jeremy belongs to the *Tsayu* Clan. His mother’s name is C’tan (Marjorie Dumont) and his father’s name is John Dumont and Stan Nikal jr. He descends from a strong blood line; his grandfather was Wah Tah Keg’ht (Henry Alfred) and his grandmother is Wilat (Susie Alfred). He was born in Smithers, spent the first ten years of his life in Witset (Moricetown), continued his journey as young adult in Vancouver. He returned to his home of Witset in 2011. He prided himself on being an “Urban” native, He enjoyed his life in the big city but always knew there was something missing. The year he decided to move home to get reconnected with himself and

mhisy people, he knew it was going to be a life changing experience. He has always been a person to volunteer his time and efforts, if it meant changing a person's outlook on life, whether it was through sports, social gatherings, or friendships. He battled a lot of adversity over the years, almost to the point of defeat. The day he started with ANABIP was the day his personal healing journey began. He enjoys his work and will continue absorbing and passing on the knowledge that is given, which is the Wet'suwet'en way.

3.4.2.6 Tanya Brown

Tanya Brown is a Wet'suwet'en member of the *Tsayu* clan. Tanya is the front-line worker for the Burns Lake ANABIP Program. Tanya's parents are Dini ze' Madeek of the *Gitdumden* clan, Jeff Brown and Frances Brown. Tanya resides in Burns Lake and has one daughter who lives and works in the lower mainland. Tanya's educational background includes a diploma in Social Services and most recently a certificate in Indigenous Focus-Oriented Therapy and Complex Trauma. Tanya has worked in the social work field for more than 20 years in various capacities with family and child support, youth program coordination, early child development, drug and alcohol programs and women's shelter. A lot of the work for child and family support has been on the end of crisis management within an infrastructure of systems that do not work for Wet'suwet'en members. This brought Tanya to OW's ANABIP program because of the preventative work being done out on the land and based in our culture. This opportunity also allows Tanya to reconnect and strengthen her Wet'suwet'en roots, as she was raised off-reserve and non-status prior to Bill C-31. Tanya builds links and supports Wet'suwet'en members in the eastern communities of Burns Lake.

3.4.2.7 Gretchen Woodman

Gretchen Woodman has been working for the Wet'suwet'en hereditary leadership since 2011 developing, implementing and evaluating a distinctly Wet'suwet'en holistic wellness program stream. Gretchen's educational background includes undergraduate degrees in psychology and social work, and a Master of Arts degree in Conflict Analysis and Management. She worked for the BC Provincial government for 12 years as a frontline child protection social worker and team leader. Challenging existing power imbalances and the trend to over-professionalize social care responsibilities, Gretchen strongly believes that communities are the source of knowledge with inherent abilities to bring about healthy change. Gretchen provides clinical support to the ANABIP team and technical support to the Wet'suwet'en Wellness Working Group.

3.4.2.8 Jolene Andrew

Jolene Andrew is an Indigenous Community Developer working at Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House. She has been working with the Indigenous community in Vancouver for over 19 years. She specializes in building resilient communities with indigenizing strategies, cultural practices/approaches to health and land-based healing, education, and justice sectors of community and through practicing participatory decision making focusing on Indigenous community engagement, outreach, programs, project creations, development, and strategic planning.

3.4.2.9 Wii Esdes, Sandra A. Martin Harris

Sandra is from the Wet'suwet'en Nation of the *Laksilyu*, Little Frog Clan and is a member of the Witset First Nation. She resides in Gitxsan homelands in the Hazeltons. Sandra loves community development work, community and watershed planning to support the advancement of social ecological approaches. Sandra is also an IFOT practitioner working with

health, social and justice front line workers. This work helps her share teachings about intergenerational trauma, grief and loss, supports first responders, suicide prevention and debriefing supports using a body centered and land-based approach. She has the privilege of working with many indigenous Peoples across Canada and BC and the far north.

3.4.2.10 Wilawhl, Lorraine Naziel

Lorraine is a member of the Wet'suwet'en Nation. Her clan is *Laksamshu* (Fireweed and Owl Clan) and she comes from the *Tsaiyex* (Sun House). She holds a Bachelor of Arts (Human Geography with minors in both Political Science and First Nation Studies) along with a Diploma in Public Sector Management. She is the Specialist, Mental Wellness Programs, in Community Health and Wellness Services at First Nations Health Authority (FNHA). Her role at FNHA involves the Indian Residential School Survivors and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Lorraine's passion involves coaching IFOT and working with the IFOT model to support individuals and families. In addition to the certified IFOT program, Lorraine works with "Indigenous Tools for Living" which is a community-based training that gives participants concrete skills to work beside trauma. Due to the on-going pandemic, these programs are now offered on-line. Finally, the direction in her current role at FNHA has led to collaboration and networking with Traditional Healers, Knowledge Keepers and Cultural Experts from many Nations across the province of BC. All paths lead to the promotion of culturally informed and trauma informed Indigenous health and wellness in all spheres of public health.

3.4.2.11 Russell Lewis

Russell is a Wet'suwet'en Man from Witset BC. He was raised by his parents, alongside his five siblings to love, appreciate and respect his heritage and his community. He has a role in ensuring that cultural teachings continue on. The teachings of his ancestors have been on display

his entire life with the expectation that he will pass the teachings on to the next generation. The teaching of his ancestors alongside the tools and strategies brought to him by IFOT has given Russell a key to opening doors for his fellow community members to reclaim lost voices and power, lost through shared traumatic experience that continues to plague Wet'suwet'en families today. Russell is am a husband, father of four, and uncle to many. He was shown that he has a place amongst his people, which comes with the duty to share the teachings passed onto him. Russell is proud to be Wet'suwet'en, grateful for his family, honoured to have the responsibility.

Hadīh so'h oh dzin, Russell sudnī. Tsayu dīztah, Tsaya dzuhih' dīztah. S'izkoch dīnī enlī. Sneh Ughdī'oh. Sbeb Russell Lewis, snelth yahtnī Laksilyu. Selth dzain, selth tatzih' alth cought gadingiy. Siy yelth dzain natlī, siy yelth tatzih' natnī enlī.

Hello how are you, I am called Russell. I belong to the Beaver clan, house of Rafters of Beaver house. I have four children. My mother is Lillian Lewis (Ughdī'oh). My father is Russell Lewis, he belongs to Small Frog clan. My brothers, my sisters all together are eight. I have four brothers and I have four sisters.

3.4.3 Potential Risk and Mitigation of Risk

This study, focused on the evaluation of a trauma therapy model, posed certain risks to participants. Talking about trauma had the potential to cause participants distress and anxiety, particularly considering the collective and historical quality of the trauma experienced by the Wet'suwet'en community. To mitigate these risks, we engaged with participants following the four R's of Indigenous methodologies: respect, reciprocity, relevant, and responsibility.

According to *Tri-Council Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*, Chapter 9, *Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples of Canada* described three core values of respect for human dignity in research, respect for person, concern for

welfare, and justice (Government of Canada, 2018). The document highlighted the unique context of research with Indigenous peoples:

Indigenous codes of research practice go beyond the scope of ethical protections for individual participants. They extend to the interconnection between humans and the natural world, and include obligations to maintain, and pass on to future generations, knowledge received from ancestors as well as innovations devised in the present generation. (Government of Canada, 2018, section B)

In this way, concern for welfare extends beyond the individual, requiring concern for the physical, social, economic and cultural environments of participants. Justice is developed by encouraging a balance of power between the researcher and participants. Engagement and relationship building between the researcher and the community prior to initiating research and maintained throughout the process can help to reduce power imbalances and foster the understanding necessary for ethical practice (Government of Canada, 2018). Following these guidelines, I invested in building relationships, committed to ongoing reflexivity to mitigate participant risk, and we considered how risk may extend to the wider community. I have counsellor training in my graduate program in counselling psychology that was useful in discerning whether a participant became overwhelmed during the sharing circle process. In cases of participant discomfort, the advisory group and I were prepared to follow-up, and a list of counselling resources would have been provided (See Appendix A). Additionally, my research supervisor, trained in trauma therapy, would have been available to assist the participants. No such situation presented during the research process.

Research was conducted with the informed consent of participants and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Prior to the sharing circle process, all participants were

made fully aware of the scope and focus of the research. The sharing circle process was co-created. In this way, participants focused their contributions and stories according to personal preference. Identities and stories were shared based on specification by participants. Participants and the advisory group approved all stories and their interpretations represented in the thesis (Buchanan, personal communication, January 10, 2020). Understanding the collective and community impacts of the research and the community's consent was sought by way of the advisory group throughout the project (Kovach, 2010). The advisory group recommended how protocol and ceremony be woven into the research process by use of Wet'suwet'en language, opening and closing prayers, experientials (guided meditations that focused on the land), and gifting of medicines.

3.4.4 Informed Consent

After the advisory group approached selected participants, I followed-up with an initial individual meeting. I explained in detail the purpose, scope, and focus of the research. I then gave each participant a paper copy of the informed consent contract and discussed each section (See Appendix B). I explained the sharing circle process that occurred over *Zoom* online video sessions due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In the first phase of the sharing circle, participants considered how IFOT principles were aligned with or divergent from Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing and being. In the second phase, participants shared stories about their experience of IFOT. In the third phase, participants collaboratively identified themes by consensus to answer the research question and other questions that arose in the process. In the final phase, the participants reviewed the themes and provided feedback. The approval and feedback of participants was sought throughout. I explained that the thesis would be shared with them for comment and approval. I also elaborated on confidentiality. Considering the collective nature of

the analysis and the opportunity for co-authorship of articles that may arise from the research, participants decided to waive confidentiality. I explained that all research data would be stored in a locked filing cabinet, in a locked office at UBC and digital files would be encrypted, and password protected. I explained the role of the advisory group, indicating that concerns or complaints about the process could be directed to them, or myself. Further, I gave the contact information for the UBC Office of Research Ethics and explained the process of registering concerns or complaints. I reiterated that each participant could choose to withdraw from the study at any time.

3.4.5 Data Collection

Our data collection process aligned with Indigenous methodologies, honouring collectivity and storytelling, and was rooted within Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing and being. Our sharing circle process had several phases and was facilitated by the Wet'suwet'en advisory group and me (See Appendix C). The sharing circles were all held over *Zoom* and were video and audio recorded. The first two phases reflected data collection and the final phases its interpretation. In the first phase, participants explored how IFOT principles were aligned with or divergent from Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing and being. In the second phase, participants shared stories about their experiences with IFOT. I began the sharing circles with a short introduction in Wet'suwet'en, mentored by Ts'akë ze' Wilat and her daughter, Delores Alfred, both fluent Wet'suwet'en speakers. Dinī ze' Madeek offered an opening prayer and Dinī ze' Neekupdeh then led the group in an experiential, and facilitated a group check-in. Throughout, the use of the Wet'suwet'en language was supported and encouraged. Ts'akë ze' Wilat and Delores Alfred translated key IFOT expressions and aspects of the research process into Wet'suwet'en (see Appendix D). I provided informal facilitation with questions decided upon by

the advisory group, and requests for clarification. Dinī ze' Madeek ended each sharing circle with a closing prayer.

3.4.6 Data Analysis

The data was analyzed and interpreted in a recursive process. Using narrative analysis, researchers do not separate a narrative into component parts but maintain the story intact and theorize from the overall case. The emphasis is on the content; the thematic meaning of the narrative is of interest, rather than its form. In this way, cases are used to develop a theoretical argument (Riessman, 2008).

The data analysis occurred in the third and fourth phases of the sharing circle. The final session was added after the third meeting as the group required additional time to complete the interpretation. The participants and I conducted the thematic analysis orally. We analyzed the stories and identified the patterns and themes present. Through consensus we determined the main themes that underlaid the research. These phases of the sharing circle were video and audio recorded over *Zoom*. Recordings of the sessions were shared with the participants for their review. I wrote-up the analysis and sought approval from the group through a member-checking procedure, initially during the final sharing circle and then individually with each participant via phone and email. Two external readers, both Indigenous academics provided feedback on the thematic interpretation of the findings (M. Buchanan, personal communication, January 10, 2020).

3.4.7 Representation of Findings

Following Indigenous methodologies, the representation of findings reflected data collection and interpretation rooted in Wet'suwet'en epistemology, consensus-based, dialogical analysis, and reflexivity of the research team. The stories represented are in the voices of

participants, either directly written or approved by them. Collaborative interpretation analysis was similarly conducted by the participants and me. If studies are published from this research, they will be co-authored by the research team and the participants. The findings of the research project will be shared in the Wet'suwet'en community through clan meetings, as determined by the advisory group (M. Buchanan, personal communication, January 10, 2020).

3.4.8 Ethical Considerations

It is helpful to understand ethical considerations in terms of Kovach's (2006; 2010) precepts of Indigenous methodologies:

evidence of a tribal epistemology, integration of a decolonizing aim, acknowledgement of preparations necessary for research, space for self-location, a clear understanding of purposefulness and motivation of the research, guardianship of sacred knowledges, adherence to tribal ethics and protocol, use of Indigenous methods (as conversation and story), and giving back. (Kovach, 2010, p. 129)

I located myself in the research and committed to being reflexive throughout the process. The research followed Wet'suwet'en protocols in its preparation and was guided by the advisory group designated for the project. The research was situated within Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing and being. Ethical review, through the UBC Research Ethics Board (BREB) and the Wet'suwet'en advisory group was obtained prior to beginning research. In addition, the research followed to the *Tri-Council Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, Chapter 9, Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples of Canada* (Government of Canada, 2018). Verbal and written informed consent protected participants' sense of safety. I treated each story as a gift that was shared; stories were central to the research process. Interpretation was carried out through the lens of Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing.

Narrative inquiry and analysis were used to substantiate and deepen my understanding in consultation with the participants and the advisory group. Oral dissemination of knowledge was interwoven throughout the process. Finally, reciprocity was embedded in the research process. Foremost, the research was intended to serve the Wet'suwet'en community. These commitments were outlined in the Research Agreement signed by the UBC research team and the OW advisory group (See Appendix D).

Feedback from the advisory group and the participants indicated that the research had positive impacts. Participants reported that they felt inspired listening to others' stories and validated in their work. They appreciated being part of a community of practice and specified that the process helped them to ground IFOT in Wet'suwet'en ways. Participants also noted the tensions of having a non-Indigenous researcher, the importance of the research being driven by Wet'suwet'en people, and the need for the Wit'suwit'en community to benefit.

3.4.9 Trustworthiness of Findings

In Indigenous methodologies, trustworthiness of findings relies upon following the four R's of Indigenous methodologies, and ensuring relational accountability (Wilson, 2001).

According to Wilson (2001):

An Indigenous methodology then becomes talking about relational accountability. As a researcher you are answering to all your relations when doing research. You are not answering questions of validity or reliability or making judgements of better or worse. Instead you should be fulfilling your relationships with the world around you. So your methodology has to ask different questions: rather than asking about validity or reliability, you are asking, "Am I fulfilling my role in this relationship? What are my obligations in this relationship?" (p. 177)

Following from this perspective, relational accountability is central to trustworthiness of the research. Therefore, at all stages of this research I considered these questions and consulted with the advisory group about my role in terms of relational accountability.

The narrative inquiry approach to trustworthiness parallels Wilson (2001)'s argument. For Riessman (2008), the validity of the project is situated within the field and research paradigm it is embedded in; "narrative truths are always partial- committed and incomplete" (p. 186). Validity arises from the narratives' meaning, rather than if it is factually accurate. Following Riessman, I considered coherence, persuasion, and presentation, as trustworthiness. Coherence may be global, local, or thematic, and need not be linear. Coherence may reflect coexistent realities "selves and communities that are pulling together and pulling apart at the same time" (Riessman, 2008, p. 191). Persuasiveness is gained when theoretical arguments are supported by participants' narratives (Riessman, 2008). I checked with participants to ensure that the written stories were comprehensive and reflective of their experiences. Persuasiveness was further developed by combining multiple perspectives, those of the research participants, the Wet'suwet'en advisory, the Indigenous external readers, and my own. Gone (2004) indicated that the enlistment of traditional healers, helpers and elders offered insight into an analysis of the validity, viability, and effectiveness of new strategies in a mental health context in Indigenous communities. Presentation can pertain to whether a research project is pragmatically useful and contributes to social change and dialogue (Riessman, 2008). The advisory group reported that the research provided a document which portrays Wet'suwet'en approaches to wellness and healing that may be used for awareness building within the community, as well as to share with government officials to affirm Wet'suwet'en approaches and to illuminate Wet'suwet'en ways. Pragmatic use is supported by transparency: "(1) making explicit how methodological decisions

were made; (2) describing how interpretations were produced [...]; and (3) making primary data available to other investigators where appropriate” (Riessman, 2008, pp. 195-196). Throughout, I have made methodological decisions explicit and explained how interpretations were produced.

Chapter 4: Findings

The data collection process included a series of four sharing circles which were informally facilitated by the advisory group and the research team. The findings showed that Indigenous Focusing Oriented Therapy (IFOT) healed trauma so that intimacy could be restored, helping Wet'suwet'en people to be in connection with their own *yintah*, and *c'idede'*. IFOT must be considered as part of an overarching Wet'suwet'en wellness framework and strategy; IFOT was being used as a tool to invigorate and restore Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing and being. The following themes were identified collaboratively: foundations for IFOT integration; connection to *yintah*, ancestors, body, language, stories, ceremony, and spirituality; fostering a Wet'suwet'en collective; reclaiming Wet'suwet'en identities; supporting helpers to do their work; fostering Wet'suwet'en wellbeing and decolonization and lastly, strengthening healing.

The following story, recounted by Lorraine, illustrates how these themes were interwoven and embedded in Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing and being:

I had one session. And it was really amazing because this person is really familiar with our holistic wellness conceptual framework for the Wet'suwet'en. . . . She set a whole lot of issues down: being a student, and being a mother, and dealing with being away from home, and then coming home, and then family dynamics, and lateral violence. She set a whole lot of things down. And when she wanted to pick one thing, she picked a pain in her stomach. And so, we started working with that, and it actually turned out to be probably the size of like a laundry basket. That's how big it felt to her. And when we went through the process, it became so amazing, because she was able to you know after setting things down, she was able to pick the one thing, when we looked into it, she ended up going through a grief and loss process in a very traditional Wet'suwet'en way. . . .

She had lost her mother as a very, very young child, and what she brought up was the fact that she wasn't allowed to go to the graveyard. They thought she was too little and what that meant is, after many, many, many years, she was still carrying that loss in her stomach and it was big and she said she didn't know how much therapy and things she's been trying over the years to deal with that, and I was trying to find a way for her to take that energy and that bodily feeling out and give it some medicine and give it some land to rest on. And it turned into a grave marker, a headstone. So, when she was able to pull it out, we were going through this whole process of dragging a headstone.

And there were people that were pulling on it to help her to put the headstone down forever, that process after a year. But her family and her were holding onto it and she was having a really hard time letting it go. So, we walked through that whole process of getting from her starting place to her mother's resting place. And when she finally got there, she went through this really intense process of laying down the headstone. And when we checked to see if there were people in the room. There were ancestors, and it was just really one of the most amazing IFOT experiences I've ever had. . . .

So, I was able to take that experience and give it weight and, and turn it into a process that she missed out on as a young child, where she didn't see all those things happen for her mom. And I feel emotional about it because it was really incredible. So, at the end of it, she laid down the headstone, and there was so many tears. Tears that she felt like she'd been holding on for a lifetime. And at the end of it, she had her eyes closed and I asked that she pray to her creator. And she did and she said, "there's so many people around. They're all around. They're here with me all these people that I haven't seen for a

long time. And, and they're letting me know that everything's okay and this is the most peace I've ever had in my life about this whole situation.”

And it was just so beautiful, so she spent time with her ancestors. She spent time with her mother, who came and held her hand. And she was able to say goodbye to her and talk to her in the session and going into that place and doing that work with her was incredibly beautiful. And so, it just lifted her spirit so much. So, she was able to, you know, end the process by thanking her mother, thanking the ancestors. She heard them sing a song in our own Wet'suwet'en way and she even went to wipe down the stone and clean it off and we just thanked the creator and all that is for that experience and bringing her back to the room was kind of challenging because she didn't want to leave that place. It just was so nice to have the ancestors and her mom there with her. So, it took, probably, I think that was like an hour and 45-minute session in all. And it was incredible.

Lorraine's story reveals the Wet'suwet'en worldview in which healing is decentralized from within the individual to the ancestral line. In this story, the practice of IFOT elicited laying the headstone, creating a transformative healing process in a traditional Wet'suwet'en way.

4.1 Foundations for IFOT Integration

IFOT is a therapeutic tool embedded within an overarching Wet'suwet'en wellness framework and strategy. The adoption of IFOT was facilitated by several foundational factors including the representative selection of IFOT practitioners by Wet'suwet'en Chiefs, the cultural alignment of IFOT and Wet'suwet'en ways, the ANABIP² program which provided the

² *Anuk Nu'At'en Ba'glgh' iyi z'ilhdic* (We are talking about our ways [ANABIP]) works collaboratively with the Ministry of Child and Family Development to support children and families in culturally meaningful ways (Office of the Wet'suwet'en, 2012).

framework for training practitioners and sharing of IFOT in communities, and the hereditary structure of clans and house groups that integrated IFOT in the traditional governance system.

The Hereditary Chiefs selected practitioners to be trained in IFOT to reflect a balance of women and men, frontline workers, and Chiefs, Wet'suwet'en members living across the territory and on the Lower Mainland of BC, and representation from each of the five Wet'suwet'en Clans. In this way, a diverse group of IFOT practitioners was trained who were representative of the Wet'suwet'en Nation.

Throughout the Wet'suwet'en IFOT training, Ts'akē ze' Wilat conducted a cultural audit to ensure that what the group was learning was aligned with Wet'suwet'en teachings. According to Gretchen, the clinical advisor for the ANABIP program:

The cultural integrity is so important. We didn't just go off and learn something from somewhere else. Everything went through with a certain filter to make sure that what was happening was going to hold up and strengthen what was already here, as opposed to something that's coming in that may be contrary or divergent.

For Ts'akē ze' Wilat, IFOT aligned deeply with Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing and being, bringing her back to memories of her grandparents and being on the land; "IFOT hit home":

Cuhn k'uhkh, our stories, are always passed on to us. IFOT brought a lot of memories back to me. . . . The memories are when my grandmother and grandfather taught me and my siblings about our *yintah*, *niwkinic*, our language. And the rivers are very sacred. That's one thing they always told us, is sacred, is the rivers. Whether it's the river, or the canyon. And when we take salmon out of the lake and river you clean the salmon, you do not throw the bones and guts on the land, put it back into the river. Talk to it. Come back into the fold. When you pick berries in the pastures always thank *udaggi* for providing

the food, whether its root medicine or what it may be. My grandmother and grandfather, Annie Tiljoe and Peter Michelle were my encyclopedia for me and my siblings. We grew up in how to do '*anuc niwh 'it*' as well. And they taught us work ethic as a young child and I passed that down to my children and grandchildren. I never really experienced trauma until I lost my brother, Douglas Williams. He went down into the canyon 1975 and for one year I had a nervous break-down that I never forgot, and Grandma keep talking to us, that *udaggi* would be the one to call us back when he wants us back, and Grandma keep reminding us about it. And a lot of culture was taught to us as well as we were growing up. And I thank my Gitxsan grandparents both and my Wet'suwet'en side. I am so blessed. IFOT hit home for me.

Participants agreed that IFOT was adaptable to Wet'suwet'en culture and could be adaptable to other Indigenous cultures which value land-based healing and spirituality. Dini ze' Smogelgem explained:

I've been a harsh critic of pan-Indianism. . . . There are ceremonies that belong to other people that we embrace, and we practice. . . . I've been replacing those other pan-Indian teachings with Wet'suwet'en teachings over the years. . . . I've also had the opportunity to also practice IFOT with Indigenous people from other nations that married into our community and it's an amazing powerful tool. It's adaptable to anything. It's adaptable to Wet'suwet'en culture. It's adaptable to Cree, to Lakota cultures, and to cultures all over the world. . . . For me, IFOT is a tool that you can adapt to any of our cultures and our ancestors will listen to those tools and they'll participate in it. . . . I just love the tools. I love the way it works with people and I love the peace it brings to peoples' lives. Because there's a lot of that. We've seen a lot of that. . . . It's adaptable to all of our cultures.

Especially the ones that are based on land-based, ideas, land-based healing and spirituality that comes from the land.

For participants, IFOT awoke something that was always in them; IFOT was inherently aligned with Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing and being. According to Tanya, "it's just learning, learning and strengthening that identity for myself and really I'm so grateful that I was introduced to this tool and practice it in my own life in reconnecting to my way of being and Wet'suwet'en ancestry." For Jeremy, "IFOT really, really reminds you of the connection that we have with our culture and our ancestors." Participants described becoming more Wet'suwet'en from learning and practicing IFOT.

The ANABIP program has been central to IFOT's adoption in the Wet'suwet'en Nation. IFOT has become a key ANABIP approach under the Wet'suwet'en Wellness Conceptual Framework. ANABIP has supported practitioners in continuing to refine their own practice via monthly practice sessions and continued training. Through ANABIP's work with families, groups, and cultural camps, IFOT has become widely disseminated.

IFOT is being implemented through the traditional governance system of clans and house groups. Those trained in IFOT were chosen to reflect equal participation from each of the clans and to recognize clan and house group leaders. IFOT has strengthened traditional rights and responsibilities by helping people to know who they are and where they come from. The result has been a blossoming of IFOT throughout clans and house groups. According to Lorraine, "it's becoming more and more a part of how we support and help each other, from a clan-based way."

4.2 Connection to *Yintah*, Ancestors, Body, Language, Stories, Ceremony, and Spirituality

For Wet'suwet'en practitioners, IFOT brought alive connection to the land, ancestors, spirituality, the Wet'suwet'en language, stories, and ceremony in a way that was interconnected, holistic, and rooted in Wet'suwet'en ways. *Yintah*, the Wet'suwet'en word for the territory means, "we are the land and the land is us." By connecting to the land through IFOT, there was also connection to "all that is." As Dinī ze' Neekupdeh described, "the *yintah* is more than just the land; it's everything about us, everything about Wet'suwet'en and we can't take one thing away from it because it's all of it." The Wet'suwet'en Conceptual Wellness Framework places *yintah* at the center of Wet'suwet'en wellness. *Yintah* is integral to cultural competencies which include: knowledge of protocols and laws; rituals/ceremonies, stories, medicines; comfort on the land; reduce footprint; territory for healing; unpaid work; coming of age ceremonies; know genealogy; father clan, and mother clan. IFOT helped to foster these cultural competencies.

By connecting people to *yintah*, IFOT echoed how Wet'suwet'en ancestral ways bring about healing by being on the land. Dinī ze' Smogelgem emphasized this connection with the story of his great uncle Frank Bazel:

I'm thinking a lot about how our ancestors dealt with trauma and my great uncle Frank Bazel's one of the examples that comes to mind. He went to Le Jac Indian Residential school. He went there with two of his younger sisters and his toddler brother, and his siblings all didn't make it back. He made it back, but he witnessed so much there that he shut himself off in the world. He was angry, and he drank a lot when he left Le Jac, and ended up going to World War II which further traumatized him. And I remember hearing stories from Grandma when Frank came back from World War II. He was really, really,

really angry. He was angry at the world. He was angry at everything and he couldn't speak his language. He didn't know much about his culture and he was at a complete loss and it was my, my other Great Uncle Joshua Holland, who took him out on the land. He brought him up to *Lhokwa*, and up to Bernie Lakes to, to live on the land, it is really isolated back then. The only way in, you had to walk in for about a week on these trails, just to get up to where territory was. And they lived up there for a whole winter and the land healed him.

Dinī ze' Smogelgem's story emphasized how, for Wet'suwet'en people, being on the land has always provided healing from trauma.

Participants explained that IFOT evoked the land in tangible ways. Through the use of “experientials,” akin to guided meditations focused on the land and the body, the land was palpably brought into IFOT sessions. IFOT “leans into the land,” trauma can be “laid” on the land to be safely “held,” and medicines from the land can be drawn upon for healing, like a giving back of energy to the land. As Russell described:

We can use the land to lean on. We can put things out there on the land without having to leave our offices or our homes. We can we can still find a place out on the territory. . . . When we close our eyes and we're sitting and we're breathing. We like, I really, I, I feel like I can smell the air in the mountains. I can feel the sun on my face. And it takes time and practice to get to that place. I feel like, but, um, it's the same when we, when we travel out on the territories. It takes time and practice to be out there comfortably. To, to be okay on the land, and it's the same. It's the same feeling that I go through when we do those experiential activities of experiencing putting myself in a place where it's quiet and just really feeling what's going on around me. And that's, it's the same kind of sense that

we get from, from my ancestors and elders and stuff that would bring me out in the territories, you know, and when they'd be telling me stories or teaching me something, it was that kind of calmness.

Sandra described how trauma could be laid on the land:

We help lay that hurtful energy down on the land and we have peace and that's just a beautiful, beautiful way and it really speaks to Wet'suwet'en teachings, Gitksan teachings, Tahltan, Tlingit, Cree. I hear this wherever I go. It's a strong Indigenous way but it does really speak to our ways. . . . It makes sense. It's because it's a truth. It's one of our truths.

According to Sandra, laying trauma on the land was a Wet'suwet'en truth and more broadly an Indigenous truth.

Connection to land can benefit everyone. According to Lorraine, "100% of the time, every Indigenous person I work with returns to their homelands for medicine and finds it there. 100% of the time". For Dinī ze' Neekupdeh, "even the ones that don't even go out on the land, we can bring that land back to them with stories with exercises and how that comes and spirit. Then the stories come out." The land brings about a sense of peace and calm. Dinī ze' Madeek described feeling "refreshed" in his story about learning about "the gold out on the territory" from his father:

When I was about 5 years old, my dad took me out on the territory. And he said, sit here and listen. And don't move, don't make noise. He said there's gold out in the territory. Took me a long time to realize what he was trying to do, what he was saying. I was about seventeen and then I was ready. . . . We were out on the territory . . . , then this was a solo . . . He came back. Come up to me and he says, "What did you learn?" "Not sure, I

didn't learn very much.' And he said, "Why?" "I fell asleep." "The serenity, the peaceful the calm. The feeling when you get up when you're in those out in the woods and you sit. That peaceful calmness that can come over you. And it just stays with you. That by you falling asleep, you know, that was very important part of your lesson. . . . You keep in touch with the land, you keep in touch with nature, you keep in touch with Mother Earth. You get in touch with Mother Earth. And then be able to do anything you want and not be afraid and move forward." And when I was about seventeen, I remember what he said. . . . the peaceful and the calmness. That's the forever. And it was a was a beautiful feeling just me and I didn't get a moose, but . . . when I come back, I was like refreshed.

Dinī ze' Madeek emphasized how the peace he experienced, "getting in touch with Mother Earth" allowed him to "not be afraid and move forward."

Being out on the territory is connected to the Wet'suwet'en language, ceremony, *cin k'ikh* , and *c'idede'* , teachings from elders and ancestors, *niwhhts'ide'nī*. For Ts'akë ze' Wilat, "our language is connected to our land" and ceremony was woven throughout IFOT. Jolene explained that:

Being close to the land was our ceremony and when I moved to the city, I really missed that. . . . Ceremony is something that's really important to me. . . . I noticed the ease and ability we were able to get into ceremony with each other. . . . Really beautiful experience to witness, . . . everyone is comfortable getting into a space where it is ceremonial and it is powerful and it's gentle.

Dinī ze' Smogelgem highlighted the interconnection of *yintah* and ancestors in IFOT:

IFOT brings us into like a mental state where we visualize the land coming to us. And allowing the land to be a part of that healing process that we need. . . . More

often than not, our ancestors show up. And they have advice for us. . . . IFOT opened up a treasure chest so we can access teachings from our ancestors. . . . I had a lot of examples of doing IFOT with people where they felt the presence of a grandmother or a great aunt or an ancestor from a long time ago that was with them and they would they're able to vocalize, what it was they were saying. . . . It was amazing, like the ancestors showed up, their ancestors showed up. And that being curious . . ., I could I could feel them there. I knew they were there. I knew what they looked like. . . . It's beautiful. How like the ancestors do come through and sit with you. . . . But I've always found it like super beautiful and super grounding. But I've always found it like super beautiful and super grounding. And just a constant reminder that that our territories aren't just crown land. Our territory is our homes that belong to us. And the ancestors are asking us to go home. To get off the reserves and go home.

The *niwhhts'ide'ni*, were a grounding and guiding presence in IFOT and integral to Wet'suwet'en wellness. For Ts'akë ze' Wilat, "it's really important where we come from. Not forgetting our ancestors."

IFOT's ability to help bring alive connection to land and ancestors related to Wet'suwet'en understandings of time. Past, present, and future coexisted in IFOT and were available to support healing and be healed in turn. Sandra described this "shared connection to life and land" as a "sacred connection", and a "holistic understanding, you can't separate people from land". Here, "our people have all-time present and the ancestors are here from our past, but they also help us bring forward to the future. So, there's that connection, that timeless connection

which really made a lot of sense to me because we can feel it.” The existence of past, present, and future in IFOT facilitated intergenerational healing. Tanya elaborated on how this happens:

We talk about the intergenerational and when we're visiting those places of trauma and guiding through looking for those medicines that we're not just healing ourselves here today. We're healing our ancestors, we're healing our future generations that aren't even born yet, you know, all at the same time. So, there's that interconnectedness, that intergenerational collective peace and the decolonizing, you know, that was a big way.

In Wet'suwet'en and IFOT understandings, because of the inherent interconnectedness of all beings across time, healing in the present extended to the past and the future.

The timeless connection that Sandra and Tanya spoke to existed in the body—it could be felt. IFOT began with the body. Dinī ze' Madeek explained this: “with IFOT everything is about your body. You look into your body to see what's bothering you, what your aches and pains are.” In this way, IFOT was inherently physical. Tanya captured the physicality of the approach:

How powerful, that is, you know, like, holy man like I recognize to when we're doing the sessions and we're doing the physicalness, getting whatever it is that they need out and, and really letting them practice it you know and really use those motions physically and how much that does shift and move things.

As Tanya spoke, she used her broad arm gestures to communicate the physicality of IFOT, conveying the extent to which body sensations were integral to the approach. Sandra shared a story of her own experience during a 5-minute check-in during a recent IFOT workshop, highlighting how IFOT worked from and with the body:

We were practicing a check-in. This was 2 days after signing the MOU [Memorandum of Understanding] so it was a pretty intense time. And so, when I did a check-in, I could feel

a real tightness in between my shoulder blades, a real heaviness there. And so, when I checked-in I could see a color. It was kind of a brown, tan color and as I got to go more and more deeper, it was like cedar, color of cedar wood. And as I got more in touch with my felt sense, I could feel like a braid, like a cord. And as soon as that image came to mind, the cedar ring, that elders used to have around their neck popped up. So, there's a cedar ring, and then a longer cord, like a braid, a cedar rope that kind of came out of the sky and came down and connected me to that. And then, it was so amazing, because all of a sudden, I felt, you know, the ancestors there. I felt Gisdaywa, because I live close to where Gisdaywa lives, or lived. Dzii, Madeline Alfred, all kinds of elders, all of a sudden, were there, people I haven't seen before. And when they did another check-in, I could feel the tightness in my chest. And so, another color came forward and after some check-in it was like a newness, like a birthing. So, all at that one time, I could see and feel the past, but I could also feel this newness for the future, like a birthing. And it was so amazing. And, you know, those 5-minute check-ins, what happens. So that was only a couple weeks ago, but it was really, and then I could just breathe, and I could feel just this immense connection. To so much love, really and very, very helpful Because we're going through some really big change in our, amongst our people here. I could just feel really grounded.

Sandra's story exemplifies the interconnectedness inherent in IFOT. Starting with the body, Sandra was brought to a cedar rope, to the ancestors, to the land, where the past, present, and future all existed. Sandra's story also highlighted the connection to spirituality present in IFOT.

IFOT was a spiritual process, aligning with the foundation of spirituality in the Wet'suwet'en Conceptual Wellness Framework. Dinī ze' Madeek elaborated on the spirituality that was inherent in connection to the land:

Hiltus, strengths, it's all built in. You find that when you get out on the territory.

Spirituality, that's connection to the land and to your own body, to bring that spirituality out on the land back into your heart. . . . Sustainable livelihood, everything that we take off the land, we pray for, everything that we take, we give an offering back. . . . The land, the territories, the river, the lakes, how it purifies your system, how it purifies your ability to be out on the territory.

Sandra helped to explain the spirituality that underlies the interconnection of the *yintah*, and how it is linked to *wiggus*, living in good relations:

Peacemaking . . . , how important it is in Wet'suwet'en culture, our whole kinship, clan system is about peacemaking. . . . To live in a good way, with *wiggus* and to uphold our responsibilities . . . is one of our most important in our ways. And that comes from this whole-body approach body, mind, and spirit, this collected piece. . . . Within my family, within my house. With the land, ancestors. It's all, all together there. And when we come into that moment when we're feeling whole, we notice all of it. All times are present, the spiritual piece is there. And we, we can feel that connection and we are at peace. And that's when we're at that place. Then we have healing.

Healing arose from connection and the peace and spirituality that are inherent in "living in a good way".

IFOT helped to foster connection to the *yintah*, ancestors, ceremony, spirituality, language, stories, and the body in a holistic Wet'suwet'en way. *Yintah*, the center of the

Wet'suwet'en Conceptual Framework, is the center of Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing and being; it was also at the center of IFOT.

4.3 Fostering a Wet'suwet'en Collective

IFOT fostered the sense of a collective amongst Wet'suwet'en people in the present and across time, reinforcing the interconnection that underlies all beings according to Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing. According to Tanya:

This connectedness . . . is a shared experience and it's just amazing, you know, and that all of that is it is within me. To help heal those places, to help others and to help rebuild and revitalize that connection of my people to language and territory.

Tanya noted that the “shared experience” was “within” her. IFOT created an embodied experience of the collective. This emphasis on the collective is an integral part of Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing and being, as Sandra explained:

Sacred connection to all that is... And so, there's a sacred responsibility there to honor that, to listen to it. It helps guide us, and it teaches us that we're not alone. . . . We are a collective as Indigenous people as Wet'suwet'en people. In our families, in our house and clan, as a Nation. And so that was something you don't see ever in Western science or Western medicine, that collective. It's all, it's always about the individual, treating the individual with one symptom. And so, the world view of *wiggus*, respect for all that is, because we're part of all that is. There's that oneness. And that sacred responsibility to take care of that oneness. That life force, because life is precious.

Sandra noted the “sacred responsibility” that is attached to the collective and underlies the concept of “*wiggus*, respect for all that is.” For Jolene, IFOT also aligned with *wiggus*:

I think the strongest teachings that we receive is *wiggus*, it's, you know, how are we treating each other when we are helping each other. The Western world really taught us how to be judgmental and how to compare 'I have a nice truck and look at that poor family' and you know, I think there's a real severe cycle of dependency and poverty that just really frustrates me, so you know that's, that's not how I think. I don't think that's culturally right for us. I think, you know, being respectful is treating everybody respectfully. So, I think the IFOT, just with its language . . . and just with the way we're taught to look at trauma really reminds us to be humble and to be respectful and it doesn't matter where anybody is in their life, they need to be respected. It doesn't matter what they've done, or you know what's going on for them or how angry or mean or how you know upset or disrespectful they might be, but you know there's something there that needs to be taken care of. So, I think for me, that's how it really lines up with how I see the world.

Jolene highlighted how IFOT connected with *wiggus*, "treating everyone respectfully", in its approach to trauma. IFOT encouraged humility and respect, aligning with how Jolene sees the world.

Social responsibility is related to sharing experiences communally, as Madeek described: Social responsibility is a really big part of this. You've got to share what your experiences are. You share with your cousin, your nephew, every, everybody, anybody, you share what you're feeling and how your body feels when you do things that are spiritual. Bring seen and been heard. That's what I'm talking about. The communication of what you feel out on the territory, you bring that back and you share that with them,

and you feel your brain more at ease . . . you're at peace with yourself. With your people. You're more able to share, more able to speak out about what you're feeling. And that's pretty much what we did with IFOT. We looked at ourselves. What we're feeling, what pains we are having, where the pains are. And each time you get out on the territory there's medicines there for that. This is better than religion. This is us.

Dinī ze' Madeek highlighted how social responsibility was strengthened through communication of feelings, spirituality, and connection with the land.

The emphasis on *wiggus* and social responsibility has strengthened the Wet'suwet'en traditional governance system by helping people to understand and carry out their clan and house group roles and responsibilities. From their participation in ANABIP cultural camps, families have learned who they are and where they come from, and have gained knowledge of the support systems of their mother and father clans. As Lorraine explained:

The people that have had the opportunity of being to be a camp, . . . they're in the feast halls now. They've reclaimed their space in the feast halls. They feel like they belong there, and they know what to do. They understand their roles and they're so open to learning . . . which is really important to our governance system.

Russell elaborated on how this change occurs:

For people to be able to leave camps and for people to feel that they really have a connection to their ancestors, their family members, the land, and they know where they're from and they go back home in a different place than they came. . . . We've created the space where we all have the same voice coming from inside of us and that's what coming out. . . . And it makes it easier for people to relate, to give, and accept help.

IFOT emphasized the shared story of Wet'suwet'en people, encouraging people to not feel alone. According to Russell:

IFOT and the conceptual framework that we work with. I find it gives me opportunity to be able to, to help people express their inner voices their inner truths are the things that, that are real to them. You know, and it makes them, it helps them to find a way that they're not alone in it, because we all share the same story in so many ways. It gives them an opportunity to have a voice. . . . The shared story that we all have together. . . . This ongoing circle that seems to never end, just like our Chief names are passed down through the generations, that you know our ancestors are still with us.

The shared story that was fostered in IFOT strengthened relationships in the present, as well as connecting Wet'suwet'en people intergenerationally, building what Tanya described as "intergenerational resilience". Russell recalled the impact of IFOT on a group that he worked with at the Witset Adult Education Centre:

I started doing some more group work. . . . Some weeks they would go well and other weeks, they wouldn't they wouldn't go so well. . . . We started getting a few more people because they're, they're finding more interest in what IFOT was. . . . You could see that everyone would have their wall up . . . Then they would start finding, you know, it easier to share some of their own stories with each other to be able to, you know, because they would start learning that not only were they sharing with each other, but they lived through the same experiences together. . . . The instructors in the classes would start finding that, you know, they were being so much more helpful to each other, they were calling each other in the evening after school was done, and just really being there for each other, whereas before they were still like running this rat race where they were, they

were trying to do it on their own. Trying to prove to everybody how strong they were and, that they could do it. They can take care of their kids, they could work, they could go to school, and all this stuff all piled up on top of each other. . . . They had really changed The tools that they were given through the, through the workshops or the sessions that we were doing, you know, they were they were finding, they were finding it easier for themselves to open up, and share with each other and it always started out with something small and simple, you know. But then the next thing you know, they would be helping each other.

Russell's story explained how IFOT helped Wet'suwet'en people to hold each other up, creating ways to connect with, and open to each other. Resilience was fostered individually and collectively, simultaneously.

IFOT helped to cultivate a sense of the collective amongst Wet'suwet'en people, in the present and across time, helping people to feel part of a shared story and to take care of their sacred responsibility, *wiggus*. This sense of a collective helped to strengthen the traditional system of governance which relies upon Wet'suwet'en people acting on *wiggus*, as well as understanding and carrying-out their clan and house group roles and responsibilities.

4.4 Reclaiming Wet'suwet'en Identities

IFOT supported participants to more fully embody their Wet'suwet'en identities, reclaiming what was always inside of them. IFOT tapped into what Sandra described as "the implicit wisdom that is always there." Ts'akë ze' Wilat explained the Wet'suwet'en expression, *kwin gghenen dil*, they returned to the fireside, which captures a sense of "coming home":

When some young person went somewhere and *kwin gghenen dil*? "When did you come back to the fireside?" When a young person goes somewhere, never comes back a few

days. *Nk'ëdeh' kwin ggneninge*, their way of saying, “When did you come home?” And there’s another way of using fireside. When an Elder Chief passes away, and a successor arrives. Everything has happened. *Ne kwin dist ggan* they say. The light is lit again, they use that word. *Ne kwin dist ggan* they say.

Kwin gghenen dil and *ne kwin dist ggan* describe returning to the Wet’suwet’en identity that has always been there. Tanya described her experience of learning IFOT as “remembering” what she was born with, reminding her of her “bloodlines”:

When I first took the training and learnt the language, right away, I felt it. They tell us it’s our own Indigenous way of knowing, our own Indigenous way of being. I wasn’t connected to my community and culture. I was raised up off-reserve. We were non-status, you know, and I totally felt disconnected. And it wasn’t until I started learning about IFOT when it was a sense of remembering where I come from, you know, I’ve been told before, like, we’re born with our language. We’re born with our songs. That gave me like you know a lot of hope for, for revitalizing that for myself and then taking IFOT, how it reminded me, you know, that I do have these bloodlines coming to me.

Similarly, Jeremy described how IFOT helped him to feel the connection that he experienced as a child:

I moved away at a young age to Vancouver and I basically, I grew up in UBC so that disconnection has always been there. I didn’t notice it until later. . . . The thing that I noticed is that I was very connected as a kid. . . . So coming back here and getting my job with ANABIP and taking IFOT, I think that because I was so disconnected for so long that it was, I felt like it kind of amplified that feeling that I had when I was reconnected to the *yintah* and these teachings that were taught to

us. So it was, it was like overwhelming for me when I first, when I first did the training. Like I, at first, I was still in that Western, you know like living in Vancouver, I was so disconnected. I didn't believe in stuff like that. I was so disconnected, that it was just, it was not a thought in my, in my mind, like, but as soon as I started taking it and I started getting those feelings back from when I was a kid, it, it really it really hit home with me. And as I started feeling better about myself. You know, like, remembering how I felt as a kid.

Helping to “wake up” their Wet’suwet’en identities was central to healing. Dinī ze’ Neekupdeh spoke to this connection:

It’s sleeping. It’s not gone. It’s sleeping and when we need to wake it, awaken. And each one of us, through the IFOT and the collective we can bring it back and waking up, waking it up. And the healing is happening. And to start going back into the land, taking others into the land in the stories. It belongs to all of us.

By awakening their identities as Wet’suwet’en, participants were empowered. Tanya described the “right” that she felt, attached to her strengthened identity:

I’m learning more every day and it’s strengthening that, for me as an identity, like we talk about that a lot. Recognizing I have the right to all of that, you know, that I have the right to learn, to be part of today, but before because of colonization. I didn’t feel like I was. I didn’t know where I belonged, you know, growing up. In Burns Lake, even though it’s on what’s Wet’suwet’en territory. I didn’t even really recognize that until I was in my late 30s, you are living on Wet’suwet’en territory.

IFOT has helped Tanya to develop a critical awareness of her Wet'suwet'en identity, colonization, and the meaning of Burns Lake being on Wet'suwet'en territory. Jeremy described how his strengthened identity has encouraged him to take social action:

Yeah and you know and, and something like yesterday. I don't know if some of you guys seen it but I made a post about the George Floyd thing and it was basically, you know, something that hit home and I, I'd say before this. IFOT and being connected to my culture again and the land, I would have had a different mind frame with that I would have probably, you know, been one of those people that was judging everybody that was out in the cities riding it and, and stuff and not really taking a step back, taking a step back and seeing the bigger picture. And what that actually what, what these people are fighting for, it's kind of similar to what we're fighting for in our land and stuff, so you know I have. I'm thankful for that, that I have a different outlook on life because of stuff like my job and IFOT. So, I think there is a great alignment with that and the *yintah*.

In this story, Jeremy described realizing the connection between “Black Lives Matter” protests, the right and title that Wet'suwet'en people are fighting for, and taking action by posting on social media regarding his views.

IFOT supported practitioners to “remember,” “reclaim,” “wake up” their identities as Wet'suwet'en people. This reclaiming was a source of empowerment and action, creating a foundation for Wet'suwet'en wellbeing and decolonization.

4.5 Supporting Helpers to do their Work

IFOT supported the personal strength needed for participants to act as helpers in their communities. Jeremy described how IFOT has been integral to doing his work:

I'm a work in progress. . . . I wouldn't be able to do this work if I didn't do IFOT. . . .

Now I kind of understand who I am and how I'm supposed to help others. . . . You know, I had lost my brother and I had, I had a lot of guilt for, for feeling like he didn't have that that opportunity to be a part of our culture. So, you know, he was a little bit lost. I wasn't there. I held on to that guilt, but I know, I, I've learned from IFOT that it's just something that's going to be beside me and that's something that's gonna, you know, in a weird way, it was like it was something that that funneled me to do this work. And, and every day. I use, I use that as an inspiration to, to do this kind of work for others.

IFOT provided Jeremy with a framework to heal from the loss of his brother and to allow that loss to shape his "work for others." Tanya described how realizing the shared experience of interconnection inside of her helped her, "to help heal those places, to help others and to help rebuild and revitalize that connection of my people to language and territory." Moreover, working with others through IFOT was enlivening:

What I get out of it personally is seeing people awaken and, you know, seeing people being able to connect without you know, opening up their heart just kind of bleeding there on the table right, and that they can recognize like maybe they don't recognize it in the moment, but that all of that healing's coming from within, and that their, you know, their body knows what it needs. . . . So, I, I feel really fortunate that I get to do this training and helping with this tool because I learned so much. And, that really opens the doors for me personally. To really seek out those medicines of my ancestors and reclaim that for myself. What was lost. So, it's super powerful. Impacted my life greatly, improved my work immensely.

Tanya expressed the passion that she has for IFOT and what it has brought to her personally and professionally. All participants echoed this passion.

Practicing IFOT deepened over time. Lorraine explained, “what I’m finding is that my experience becomes richer and richer.” Multiple opportunities exist for additional training including coaching others learning IFOT and participating in Indigenous Tools for Living, a condensed, weeklong IFOT workshop. For Tanya, “it’s like a muscle that we have to keep working. . . . I’ve been doing coach roles for Indigenous Tools for Living and coach roles. It helps solidify teachings. It sinks in even more. I get to practice it more.” Sandra echoed this understanding of learning IFOT as an ongoing process:

We learn and get more and more deeper as we go. As we practice and learn and reflect.

And that’s another part of this teaching, is that we reflect, we listen, we witness. And that’s also a very strong Wet’suwet’en teaching, to sit beside one another, hold each other up like we do. And that just made a whole lot of sense to me because I seen that my whole life. I seen our elders do it. I see the Dinī ze’ Ts’akē ze’ do that because they do that, I see our children do that. So, it just made a whole lot of sense to me.

In this statement, Sandra described how the IFOT approach to helping by “sitting beside” and “holding each other up” was also a strong Wet’suwet’en teaching. Jolene emphasized this point as well, by saying: “it’s a nice way to put into practice a way that is true for us.”

The Wet’suwet’en and IFOT approach of “sitting beside” helped practitioners help others process trauma by releasing them of the responsibility for their client’s healing. Instead, they trusted the body of their client to guide the process to, as Lorraine explained, “put it down once and for all.” Tanya described how IFOT teachings helped her to “self-preserve” in her work where burnout can be common:

When I first took the training, every time I went to a session, it was, it was like a hard struggle, you know, and, and as soon as I sat in the circle, I was like, you know, I was like, yes. You know, I'm right where I'm supposed to be this, you know, blood, sweat, tears, it was, it was totally worth for me just to sit in that circle, and it seemed like things came up in my life, specifically at that time, so that I could process it through the practice sessions and being a client and I recognize that IFOT is, is a lot of big part of self-preservation in our the work that we do. . . . A lot of what we were going to be doing and learning is how to, how to take care of ourselves. Right off the bat, when we're taught, you know, how do we connect and protect ourselves when we're doing this. . . . That unknowing of how we're going to help this person, but it's not up to us, you know, and that was a huge relief for me that this tool is just to sit beside and, and know that sometimes we're going to get it wrong, but their body is always going to make it right again. And it's ok. It's ok for us to fumble and check-in, have I got that right?

Jolene elaborated on how the IFOT approach has helped her to let go of other people's trauma:

I think that's one of the things that IFOT does for us is we, we don't hang on to it. We don't, you know, we don't we don't carry it with us. We're taught, we're given the good tools on how we can set it down and then, of course, not carrying other people's trauma.

IFOT supported practitioners with the tools to help others process trauma without hanging onto it themselves. Importantly, there was ease and gentleness in the IFOT process. According to

Sandra:

The ease of it . . . because there is so much fear around healing, around counselling, around the story . . . but if we look in with gentleness, with much love and kindness, it's

such a powerful way to take care of that something, and once people experience that, it's just a whole shift that happens in their wellbeing.

For participants, IFOT was an approach that enlivened them, fostering passion and connectedness personally and professionally. IFOT provided them with an approach and the tools which allowed them to help others heal from trauma while preserving themselves.

4.6 Fostering Wet'suwet'en Wellbeing and Decolonization

Participants described how IFOT has helped people of the Wet'suwet'en Nation to heal trauma so that they could heal themselves according to Wet'suwet'en ways. In so doing, IFOT has supported Wet'suwet'en people to become leaders in defining Indigenous rights and title in Canada. The healing that has occurred as a part of IFOT was both personal and collective, strengths-based, and rooted in Wet'suwet'en “*'anuc niwh'it'ën, k'uhkh, yintah, wiggus, . . .* our language, our feast hall,” as Sandra described. In this way, IFOT has been decolonizing, supporting Wet'suwet'en wellness to emerge from within the Nation. As Tanya explained, “we didn't have the words for what we were feeling, what decolonization is, how we were still entrenched in it . . . but we felt it, we just didn't have a word for it . . . to break free we seek out our Wet'suwet'en ways of being.”

IFOT encouraged Wet'suwet'en people to define themselves according to their ways. Jolene explained, “deconstructing you know, undoing the way that we see ourselves . . . really undoing that that Western view of what's good and what's bad and really putting a cultural lens on those things.” According to Dinī ze' Smogelgem:

That's one of the crucial parts of IFOT for me that that comes to mind . . . how it connects us to the *yintah* for me it's a real something that's tangible. It's something that Western science can't put it's finger on because they don't really understand. Which is

alright, but for Indigenous people, we should, we should use tools that we actually understand that we can relate to. And IFOT seems to do that really well for us.

IFOT has helped participants to deconstruct Western ways of healing and instead to honour tools and principles that were true to them. Lorraine described how this has been personally meaningful for her:

I really had to do a lot of decolonizing of my spirituality and my beliefs. And I feel more authentic in who I am, and I feel more connected to, to our Creator. And it brings me the peace I've been looking for my whole life. And from a very personal perspective that decolonizing of my, my mind and my thoughts and my values has really grounded me in being who I am as a Wet'suwet'en woman. And I feel very grateful for this opportunity, because you know that's not what they teach in the program. But that's what I took out of it. And that whole connection to the land, to my culture, to my governance system, to our protocols, our ceremony, our law, all of that is brought forward into an IFOT experience and also into how I am in my life and has really developed me into, I believe, who I'm supposed to be. And I feel that's really beautiful. . . . That experience is, is it's so empowering. And I'm noticing that, as a result, people are open, they're open to being curious, they're open to wanting to know what that must feel like and then working really hard through IFOT sessions to find what it is in their life, they're looking for that is authentic for them.

Lorraine described how the decolonizing impact of IFOT reflected the interconnection of land, culture, governance system, protocols, ceremony, law and how this has allowed her to be more authentically herself, as a Wet'suwet'en woman. For Tanya, IFOT provided a framework to do her work:

I knew in this world that I wanted to help and when I was in college, I didn't feel right. I felt like I was assimilating and I didn't want that, I didn't want to be a brown social worker, a brown faced social worker, and I resisted it, until I was introduced to IFOT and the language of IFOT and I got attracted to it so quickly and I just wanted to dive headfirst into it. And I said, this is what I want to do.

These stories reflected what Sandra described as, "the freedom to be ourselves [...].

Emancipation, it's about freedom to be ourselves, live the life we want to live, be the people we want to be."

IFOT provided a tool for Wet'suwet'en people to heal themselves. Russell explained this clearly:

Before IFOT I kind of had a sense that we always needed somebody from the outside to come around to help us, whereas now with IFOT, you know, my, my body knows how to help myself. My body knows how to fix myself, you know, and it's, it's the tools that we've learned through it that that have gotten me to this this place of feeling like you know I can handle these really difficult situations in life and sharing that with people for some of my community members here it's really opening them up. . . . It's our own people, our own grassroots, all the way up to therapists in our community that can carry this tool and be there for our people. . . . We are the ones who have to do it for ourselves, you know, just like in IFOT nobody sat down beside me and ever said I'm going to fix you today. You know, I did it. I went through the journey. I, I had accomplished something and our culture's the same way. . . . You have to put the time in, you have to figure things out and that's what IFOT does. . . . The strengths that I've seen in our people to be able to put down somewhere on the land, the trauma that they don't need for the

day. . . . No one's going to do this for us as Wet'suwet'en people. . . . IFOT is really a step in the right direction to let us do the work for ourselves.

IFOT supported Wet'suwet'en people to do the work for themselves. The impacts of IFOT expanded from practitioners to their families and communities. Russell continued to describe how his ten-year-old son was integrating IFOT and sharing it with friends:

I use this at home too, to make sure that my children know that they have a voice and that anything that is bothering them it's, it's real and true for them. And my son. . . . It really affected him emotionally for a few weeks . . . So we had just gone through a little, a little session. And you know, I just asked him to figure out whereabouts he was feeling these things and just it was really, really physical, like it was making him feel sick, and wasn't so much emotional and after we had figured that out, we have gone through some some experiential stuff and, and it was just really cool, because after that, like he had found his answers for himself what it was that he was going through and I heard him like helping another friend out. I went to go and pick them up at the school and he was doing like a similar thing and helping them to figure out their emotions . . . then so my son is sitting there with one of his buddies and he's telling them about, you know, this, this anxious feeling that you have in your belly like it's not it's not just ours. . . . It's really cool that you know just doing this little session with my son and I didn't tell him, that's what we were doing. But then he had felt it in a way that he had used it the next day, even with like his friend to help him out in feeling his emotions are going through.

IFOT was effective because it is strengths-based and rooted in Wet'suwet'en ways, as Jolene explained:

It's already within us. IFOT just gave us the language to put it into practice. . . . It's not from outside of us, everything we have is already there. So, when we do apply IFOT, naturally we're going to use our Wet'suwet'en worldview. So yeah, just that strength based, we have it in us already. So, it's all there.

Participants distinguished IFOT from Western therapy. As Russell explained: "It's not therapy, it's a connection to, to our past really is what it seems to seem to turn into . . . I didn't have the answers for them, like the answers were coming from themselves."

For IFOT practitioners, IFOT "changed the conversation," creating alternate possibilities as Gretchen described:

It's not just blindly following something that has just come to town. . . . There is more Wet'suwet'en nature coming through and this tool amplifying that in some way. . . .

What I've witnessed with IFOT is tapping into this deeper wisdom that is not our own, it's collective, it's ancestral. . . . And then my mind goes of course to all the MOU stuff and everything else and around how important the IFOT methodology is becoming in replacing, what otherwise would have been probably all of our practitioners need to go out and getting social work degrees. I have respect for the social work degree that I carry . . . We would be in a different shape. . . . We would not be having this conversation. . . . This is a deeper ancestral awakening thing that would not, not come through some kind of imposed Western methodology.

Gretchen noted how IFOT, with its collective and ancestral lens, shaped a different possibility for the Wet'suwet'en Nation.

The year 2020 saw Wet'suwet'en Chiefs and leadership leading "Wet'suwet'en Strong" protests across Canada and internationally in defense of their protection of their traditional

territory from Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) pipeline development. Participants explained how IFOT created the foundation for this leadership to be possible. Dinī ze’ Smogelgem described this as learning to “love each other again”:

The IFOT program itself showed us that, and I’ve heard it over and over again . . . from a lot of the participants, that we learned how to love each other again. And for me, if we’re going to connect it to reconciliation. I think . . . that it taught us to really genuinely feel and love each other rather than look at political or social differences. Between each other like we saw that there is a common thread. And that was our ancestors and our families. And I could really sense that during the IFOT program itself and after the IFOT program, you look at what happened recently with the with the huge events around with “Wet’suwet’en Strong” all across Canada. The Chiefs all got together, the families all got together, and we decided to try and work our way through this stuff and the governments responded with the proposed MOU and the discussions that we had with them. . . . (IFOT) practitioners that were involved in those talks, not only with the government with their families. That helped us build that unity that we’ve been looking for. I think we would have been a lot more fractured right now. Honestly, if we many of us didn’t take the IFOT program, including me. So, I found, I found a lot of them got installed in it that that brought us together and for me to reconcile and the differences, not just with the government, but also amongst our families. That was an amazing tool and I really appreciate it.

Dinī ze’ Smogelgem highlighted that many of the Chiefs and leaders spearheading “Wet’suwet’en Strong” and negotiating the MOU were IFOT practitioners. IFOT gave them the

strength and connectedness to carry-through and “stand up in our truth,” as Sandra described. For Sandra, peacekeeping is integral to Wet’suwet’en ways and fostered in IFOT.

IFOT was decolonizing. Its holistic, interconnected, and collective approach, deeply aligned with Wet’suwet’en ways of knowing and being, has supported Wet’suwet’en people to heal themselves and to develop the strength and togetherness to become leaders in defining Indigenous rights and title.

4.7 Strengthening Healing

There is opportunity for IFOT to strengthen and spread throughout Wet’suwet’en communities. Learning and practicing IFOT is “a whole lifelong process” according to Sandra. Since being trained in IFOT, participants have experienced enormous shifts in their personal and professional lives and have witnessed the changes that it is encouraging within the Wet’suwet’en Nation.

The expansion of IFOT is slowed by the multiple pressures facing the Wet’suwet’en community. As Sandra explained:

We end up having to . . . focus on the most urgent and the most important things first. . . .

It’s never enough time to do all this good work, you know, in our own families in our house in our clans and our community.

Participants agreed that deepening connection to *yintah*, ancestors, and language is important for the healing of IFOT to take place. Ts’akë ze’ Wilat, as one of the few fluent Wet’suwet’en language speakers, emphasized the importance of learning the language and incorporating sacred songs:

I think we need more teaching from our ancestors. The relationship between IFOT and reconciliation is within our ancestors’ ways of living. You don’t just learn it overnight.

You just keep going there, listening, learning. Actually, I was eight years old when I started going to the feast hall and I sat under my grandma's traditional blanket. I start learning, start listening and I think learning and listening is a huge.

Moving IFOT forward means acknowledging the “good work happening already” and “supporting one another to make the fire brighter, bigger,” according to Sandra. Sandra emphasized the importance of learning family history, family preservation work and the need to trace hardship through the generations:

But they're slowly, slowly and very methodically going through step by step. Trying to reclaim their songs, their history, their language. It's decolonizing I know there's different family preservation groups that do this all over the place. I really, I really like that. And I think in our communications work. We're going to do a big poster of the timeline of go all the way around the room to show our people's history because there's been a lot in the last 200 years, let alone the previous hundreds of years. After I took this course (IFOT) you know history does matter. That's part of a reconciliation, that's part of our reclaiming, that's part of our getting centered again. All that. Yeah, all those things take time, resources and energy, coming together to build a common understanding. That it's all important work, *tabee misiyh*. We're holding each other up to all of this. These are not easy times for people. Across the world you know the Wet'suwet'en Nation is holding up the whole Indigenous rights movement around the world and we still are and that's a lot to hold up.

There is an opportunity to expand the use of IFOT throughout the Wet'suwet'en community, emphasizing working with children and youth and accessing education and health. Lorraine addressed this opportunity:

I see a strong link we could make working with children and youth . . . finding ways for it to be taught in curriculum-based way so that it's normalized . . . Something that our youth and our children just know growing up. . . . Teaching the tools that young would be amazing, what a difference that would make for their lives. Looking at a more holistic perspective, not just about social development but about education, about health about a whole lot of things.

Lorraine also spoke to the potential for “upstream approaches, rather than dealing with the fires and the crisis where we're only working with vulnerable families that are at risk of losing their families or trying to reconnect with families.”

Participants expressed hope that IFOT will continue to support healing throughout their Nation. IFOT is a lifelong process and will deepen alongside connection to Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing and being.

4.8 Summary

The effectiveness of IFOT with the Wet'suwet'en Nation was facilitated by several foundational factors, the representative selection of IFOT practitioners, cultural alignment of IFOT and Wet'suwet'en ways, the ANABIP program, and the structure of clans and house groups. IFOT fostered connection to the *yintah*, ancestors, ceremony, spirituality, language, stories, and the body in a holistic way. IFOT cultivated a sense of the collective amongst Wet'suwet'en people, in the present and across time, helping people to be in good relations and strengthening the traditional system of governance. IFOT supported practitioners to “remember”, “reclaim”, and “wake up” their identities as Wet'suwet'en people. IFOT provided helpers with an approach and the tools which allowed them to help others heal from trauma while also healing themselves. IFOT was decolonizing; it supported Wet'suwet'en wellness according to

Wet'suwet'en ways. There is opportunity for IFOT to strengthen and spread throughout Wet'suwet'en communities through deepening Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing and being, reaching children and youth, and acknowledging the good work that is already happening.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how Indigenous Focusing Oriented Therapy (IFOT) was shaped by Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing and being and how it was mobilized at the level of individuals, families, house groups, and the Nation. This research intended to support the Office of the Wet'suwet'en (OW) in their use of IFOT to bring health and unity to the Wet'suwet'en people and to inform the development of future wellness strategies, with the potential to extrapolate the findings more broadly to Indigenous counselling in Canada. This final chapter will explore the research findings in the context of the literature and explore the implications for counselling psychology practice with Indigenous peoples. Finally, I will offer suggestions for future research.

5.1 Examination of Findings in Context of the Literature

The mobilization of IFOT within the Wet'suwet'en Nation was inseparable from Wet'suwet'en conceptions of wellness and healing. The findings showed that IFOT helped to heal trauma so that Wet'suwet'en people could experience greater connection with Wet'suwet'en *yintah*, and *c'idede*. IFOT was an effective tool and approach that supported the overarching leadership of the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs to build unity and health within the Wet'suwet'en Nation. The implementation of IFOT was locally and strategically planned by the hereditary chiefs to align with their distinct context. Several foundational factors led to IFOT's effectiveness. IFOT was congruent with and adapted to Wet'suwet'en culture; the hereditary governance system created a structure for IFOT to be implemented, and the ANABIP program provided the infrastructure and support for the training of practitioners and integration of IFOT throughout Wet'suwet'en communities. The literature advocated for local control for Indigenous communities over health care systems and services to adequately and appropriately respond to

local needs (Czyzewski, 2011; Kirmayer et al., 2000; Kirmayer et al., 2008). Stewart and Marshall (2017) noted the importance of control over mental health resources by Indigenous peoples, highlighting how local control promoted the individual and collective efficacy that sustained wellness, leading to the reduction of health disparities. Existing research pointed to the indelible link between cultural continuity and positive health outcomes and advocated for community-based interventions that were rooted in cultural models of health and healing (Bombay et al., 2009; Chandler & Lalonde, 2008; Kirmayer et al., 2008; Stewart & Marshall, 2017). By implementing IFOT through the hereditary system of governance, the Wet'suwet'en Nation has mapped a new possibility for a community-based cultural model of healing, one that was embedded in the traditional structure of their society rather than imposed colonial systems.

Practitioners attributed IFOT's effectiveness to how it brought alive connection to *yintah*, ancestors, spirituality, the Wet'suwet'en language, stories, and ceremony in a manner that was interconnected, holistic, and rooted in Wet'suwet'en ways. The Wet'suwet'en Conceptual Wellness Framework has at its center, *yintah*-connectedness and IFOT upheld and cultivated this principle, echoing ancestral ways that bring about healing by being on the land. By connecting to the land through IFOT, there was also connection to "all that is," to language, ceremony, stories, ancestors, and the body. Connection to "all that is" extended to past, present, and future. All of time was available to support healing and to be healed in turn, facilitating intergenerational resilience. Moreover, IFOT was a spiritual process, linked to *wiggus*, living in good relations, and rooted in the body. The extant literature on trauma interventions in Indigenous communities highlighted holistic approaches that valued interconnectedness (Linklater, 2011; Marsh et al., 2018, 2016; Reeves & Stewart 2017, 2014; Shrigley, 2019) and identified connection to spirituality as a key aspect of interventions' effectiveness (Linklater, 2011; Reeves & Stewart

2016; Shrigley, 2019; Thomas & Bellefeuille, 2006;). Hart (2016) and Wilson (2008) emphasized that in Indigenous conceptions of wellness, everything is connected and moving toward balance of mind, body, spirit, and heart. They underlined the inseparability of body and spirit and the importance of belonging in community, land, and cosmology. Kirmayer et al., (2008) noted that relationship to land in Indigenous communities is marked by custodianship, looking after the land for the benefit of the people and the land itself, which is linked to the Wet'suwet'en understanding of *yintah*, "we are the land and the land is us." The authors highlighted the strong sense of place that distinguishes many Indigenous traditions and recognized that connection to land has spiritual, ethical, esthetic, and historical dimensions that are central to resilience (Kirmayer et al., 2008). IFOT's holistic approach and the extent to which it meaningfully facilitated connection to land, ancestors, spirituality, language, stories, and ceremony for Wet'suwet'en practitioners provides a pertinent model of an intervention that upholds the principle of interconnection and relationship to land. This study also exemplifies how, in the Wet'suwet'en worldview, healing is decentralized from within the individual to within the ancestral line. Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing and being converged with IFOT practices to create transformative healing experiences.

IFOT was effective in the Wet'suwet'en Nation because it helped to build resilience individually and collectively simultaneously, strengthening the sense of collective of Wet'suwet'en people. IFOT created an embodied experience of the collective, emphasizing the shared story of Wet'suwet'en people and encouraging individuals to uphold their sacred responsibility, *wiggus*. They consequently better understood and carried-out their clan and house group roles and responsibilities which strengthened the traditional system of governance. IFOT helped Wet'suwet'en people to hold each other up according to their traditional ways. Extant

literature on Indigenous trauma interventions identified that individual healing and community healing were intertwined and that interventions helped clients to develop trust in self and positive relationships with others (Heilbron & Guttman, 2000; Marsh et al., 2018; Shrigley, 2019; Thomas & Bellefeuille, 2006). The emphasis on individual and community healing is echoed in Indigenous conceptions of wellness where the individual is embedded in a web of relationships of family, clan, ancestors, animals, natural world, and spiritual world and interdependence is central to health (Czyzewski, 2011; Stewart & Marshall, 2017). Duran et al. (2008) identified that healing from an Indigenous perspective helps people to understand their belonging in the overall cosmology, including social, natural and spiritual worlds. For participants, IFOT not only helped individuals to experience their belonging in the overall cosmology, but also to act on their responsibilities as Wet'suwet'en people, thereby strengthening the traditional system of governance.

IFOT supported participants to more fully embody their Wet'suwet'en identities, reclaiming the implicit wisdom that was always inside of them. *Ne kwin dist ggan*, the light is lit again describes the returning to Wet'suwet'en identity that was identified as central to healing. By awakening their identities as Wet'suwet'en, participants were empowered; they gained a critical awareness of colonization and took social action. Other literature on Indigenous trauma interventions reported that participants experienced a similar strengthening of their Indigenous identities due to interventions and that this was central to healing (Gone 2009, 2011; Linklater 2011; Marsh et al., 2016, 2018; Reeves & Stewart, 2017; Shrigley, 2019). In this research, understanding the impacts of colonialism and historical trauma improved participants' sense of personal empowerment and self-determination. Duran and Duran (1995) and Gone (2004) warned that counselling and psychotherapy interventions in Indigenous communities that are

reliant on theories and techniques rooted in the Western biomedical model risk cultural displacement and assimilation, compounding the trauma that had already been experienced. Instead, according to the participants, in the application of IFOT with the Wet'suwet'en Nation, Wet'suwet'en identities were reclaimed and Wet'suwet'en culture was the basis for self-determination and social action.

Practitioners in this study were passionate about IFOT because it allowed them to help others heal according to Wet'suwet'en principles. Practicing IFOT was identified as an ongoing process that deepened over time. The Wet'suwet'en and IFOT approach of "sitting beside" helped practitioners help others process trauma by releasing them of the responsibility for their client's healing. They trusted the body of their client to guide the process. IFOT teachings, that encourage ease and gentleness, helped practitioners to self-preserve in their work where burnout can be common. The literature highlights that a new generation of practitioners is emerging, able to integrate local culture and beliefs regarding health and healing with Western models of psychotherapy, creating new, effective ways to help (Kirmayer et al., 2000; McCormick, 2008; 2012). Further, attempts at integration challenge and change colonial attitudes embedded in mental health services (Nelson & Wilson, 2017). The application of IFOT within the Wet'suwet'en Nation represented an integration of Indigenous methods and the Western model of Focusing Oriented Therapy (Gendlin, 1996), providing a model that uplifted practitioners and clients alike. Critically, IFOT is centrally an Indigenous approach which utilizes aspects of Gendlin's Focusing for its effectiveness.

IFOT has helped people of the Wet'suwet'en Nation to heal themselves according to Wet'suwet'en ways, making IFOT decolonizing. IFOT has supported participants to deconstruct Western approaches, to instead honor tools and principles that they can relate to, giving them the

freedom to be themselves and live as Wet'suwet'en people. With its collective and ancestral lens, IFOT has shaped a different possibility for the Wet'suwet'en Nation. The peacekeeping and sacred responsibility of *wiggus* fostered in Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing and IFOT helped Wet'suwet'en chiefs and leaders to stand up in defense of their traditional territory in the "Wet'suwet'en Strong" protests and MOU negotiations with British Columbia and Canada. IFOT has supported the Wet'suwet'en in standing up in their truth. McCabe (2017) argued that mental health with Indigenous communities should be driven by a decolonization ethos; approaches need to address oppression and colonization. Duran et al. (2008) explained that decolonizing mental health means legitimizing Indigenous knowledge, and centering liberatory healing practices. Poonwassie (2006) emphasized that decolonizing mental health supports needs to be community-driven and based on local resources and structures. More promising approaches arise when communities are responsible for their own healing (White, 2007). Czyzewski (2011) explored how self-determination is inextricably bound to decolonization and how the two lead to improved health. According to Kirmayer et al. (2000), self-determination, specifically, Indigenous rights, land claims, and self-government, held the key to healthier Indigenous communities. For the Wet'suwet'en Nation, IFOT provided a means for the community to be responsible for its own healing and a decolonizing lens to approach their strengths and challenges. IFOT also helped the Wet'suwet'en Nation to build the resilience and relationships necessary to become leaders in defining Indigenous right and title.

Participants were not critical of IFOT. They identified that integrating and implementing IFOT was an ongoing process, much like learning IFOT itself. Strengthening connection to *yintah*, ancestors, and language will be important for IFOT to grow. Moving IFOT forward means acknowledging the good that is already happening and working collaboratively. There is

an opportunity to expand the use of IFOT throughout the Wet'suwet'en community, emphasizing working with children and youth and accessing the sectors of education and health. Stewart (2008) described Indigenous wellness as an active, forward moving process of healing. In Shrigley (2019), complexity was inherent in healing from intergenerational trauma and in multiple Indigenous trauma intervention studies (Edwards, 2003; Gone, 2011; Thomas & Bellefeuille, 2006) approaches were a part of life-long healing journeys. Kirmayer (2008) argued that land-based knowledge, community connectedness, and historical awareness may provide sources of resilience. For Wet'suwet'en IFOT practitioners, learning and sharing IFOT will be an iterative and gradual process, embedded in Wet'suwet'en culture and structures.

5.2 Implications for Counselling Psychology Practice

This research has found IFOT to be a culturally relevant and effective trauma therapy intervention that has had meaningful impacts on the lives of practitioners and throughout Wet'suwet'en communities. The strategic implementation of IFOT by Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs created a pertinent model for community-based and cultural healing that was reinforced by and reinforced in turn, the traditional governance system. IFOT upheld holism and interconnection of “all that is,” based on relationship with *yintah*. Through IFOT and in alignment with Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing and being, participants gained connection to ancestors, spirituality, language, stories, and ceremony. IFOT helped individuals to experience a sense of collective belonging that encouraged them to take up their responsibilities as Wet'suwet'en people within the traditional system of governance. IFOT encouraged the reclamation of Wet'suwet'en identities, which became a foundation for self-determination and social action. IFOT was decolonizing in its promotion of Wet'suwet'en wellbeing and healing

from within the community. The continued development of IFOT within the Wet'suwet'en Nation will be a gradual process, rooted in Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing and being.

The Wet'suwet'en application of IFOT provides a unique example of an Indigenous trauma therapy approach rooted in culture and community, that promoted the healing of trauma through the development of intergenerational resilience. The findings highlight the strength of Indigenous healing for Indigenous communities through the example of the Wet'suwet'en Nation and may serve to inform future health policy by advocating for local control over mental health services and supports. The field of counselling with Indigenous populations may learn from the various aspects of IFOTs' effectiveness with the Wet'suwet'en Nation to support approaches that are inherently aligned with, and adapted to local contexts; honor interconnection through relationship to land; support collective belonging; cultivate Indigenous identities; are enlivening for practitioners, and are decolonizing by their promotion of Indigenous conceptions of wellbeing.

The research methodology of this study, which centered Indigenous, decolonizing, and narrative approaches, ensured that the findings were embedded in Wet'suwet'en ways of knowing and being. Throughout this study, I have attempted to follow from Duran and Firehammer (2017), situating "theory, practice, and research . . . in the life-world metaphor of the culture" (p. 122) and from Adelson (2005) in fostering research that was "inclusive, engaged, and empowering" (p. S59). Archibald (2008) and Kovach (2006; 2010) emphasized research as storytelling, highlighting relationality and reciprocity. Participants' voices formed the backbone of this study, and the collaborative interpretation of the participant group structured its analysis. As a non-Indigenous researcher representing a Western institution, I facilitated this process, endeavouring to be transparent in my attempt to understand the life-world metaphor of the

Wet'suwet'en. This thesis reflects what I hope is an integration of Indigenous and Western ways of knowing and being that privileges Wet'suwet'en understandings. The findings regarding the mobilization of IFOT in the Wet'suwet'en Nation presented in this work are situated within the life-world of the Wet'suwet'en people and must be considered as such. IFOT cannot be simply learned and applied by practitioners who do not have a lived experience of oppression and have not undergone the year-long training immersion.

5.3 Future Research Going Forward

There is a need for future research to continue to explore trauma interventions in Indigenous communities. In the Wet'suwet'en context, in particular, it is critical to acknowledge that IFOT is one aspect of an overarching wellness strategy initiated by the hereditary chiefs. In this study it was at times difficult to distinguish the impacts of IFOT from Wet'suwet'en wellness work more broadly. It would be relevant to extend the current study to explore how the Wet'suwet'en Nation is mobilizing its wellness strategy through its enactment of traditional governance and impacts on community members. As well, the connection between healing and traditional systems of governance established in this study has not yet been explored in the literature and deserves future scholarship. It would also be relevant to investigate the implementation of IFOT in other Indigenous communities to ascertain if the effectiveness suggested by this study is generalizable. Further, an analysis of IFOT alongside other models utilized by Indigenous communities in a comparative study may prove fruitful. Additional research is necessary to elaborate on Indigenous, decolonizing, and narrative methodologies, creating maps for inclusive, engaged, and empowering research with Indigenous communities.

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Appendices

Appendix A List of Counselling Resources

Wet'suwet'en IFOT Group – organizer, Gretchen Woodman,

Northern Society for Domestic Peace

Dr. Marla Buchanan, research supervisor trained in trauma therapy

Appendix B Consent Form

Indigenous Focusing Oriented Therapy and the Wet'suwet'en Nation

Principal Investigator:	Dr. Marla Buchanan Professor, Research Director UBC Centre for Group Counselling and Trauma University of British Columbia Department of Educational & Counseling Psychology and Special Education
Co-Investigators:	Dr. Jan Hare University of British Columbia Professor, Associate Dean Indigenous Education, Director Indigenous Teacher Education Program Department of Language and Literacy Education
	Dr. Alanaise Goodwill Simon Fraser University Assistant Professor Faculty of Education
	Sarah Panofsky Master's Student University of British Columbia Department of Educational & Counseling Psychology and Special Education

This research is being conducted as part of our work as professors and students in Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia in partnership with the Office of the Wet'suwet'en. The results of this research will be shared within the Wet'suwet'en community and included within a master's thesis that will become a public document in the University library once completed. The results of this research may also be published in appropriate professional and academic journals.

Purpose

The research will support the Wet'suwet'en Nation in their use of IFOT, to bring health, reconciliation, and unity to their people. The research will explore how IFOT is shaped by Wet'suwet'en worldviews and mobilized at the level of individuals, families, house groups and the nation. In so doing, the research will explore the effectiveness of IFOT within a distinct Indigenous community. IFOT is becoming well-known and widely taught throughout the

Northwest, BC, Canada, and internationally. Despite its community salience, IFOT has not been explored empirically. Finally, the need for empirical research, that is collaborative and culturally relevant, in the field of trauma and mental health with Indigenous communities has been widely documented. This research aims to address this gap, contributing decolonizing research that supports Indigenous, community-based, mental health and trauma interventions.

Procedures

Prior to beginning your participation in the research, you will be introduced to the purpose of the study and the consent contract will be reviewed with you. If you choose to participate you will sign the informed consent contract.

Your involvement in the project consists of a sharing circle process that will span two days. Sharing circles are founded on sharing by participants wherein the facilitator is given permission to report on what is shared. Sharing circles are spiritual, non-judgmental, respectful, and supportive. Sharing circles acknowledge the energy that is created by the group of participants through interconnection. The sharing circle process will be facilitated by the UBC research team and include the Wet'suwet'en advisory group. The first two phases will reflect data collection and the final phase its interpretation. In the first phase, you will explore how IFOT principles are aligned with or divergent from Wet'suwet'en worldviews. In the second phase, you will be supported to shape your stories about your experiences with IFOT. The data analysis will occur in the third phase of the sharing circle. You will share your own stories together and conduct a thematic analysis orally. You will analyze your own stories and see the patterns in our own stories with others. Through consensus you will determine what the main themes are that underlie this research. The sharing circle will be audio recorded and notes will be taken throughout on flip-chart paper. Ceremony will be used throughout process, as determined by the advisory group and the participants

Sarah Panofsky will write up the analysis and seek approval from the group. Prior to finalizing the thesis, the entire document will be shared with you for comment. If publications arise from this research, your approval and comment will also be requested.

Co-Authorship and Copyright

As your stories in your voice will be included in the research, you may choose to be a co-author of any published stories that arise from this research. You will also share copyright of the material.

Confidentiality

Any information identifying individuals participating in this study will be kept confidential. Only the research team will have access to the data. Considering the collaborative nature of the analysis of the research and the opportunity for co-authorship, you may choose to waive confidentiality. If you do not waive confidentiality, upon signing the informed consent you will be given a code number to ensure maintenance of confidentiality and participants will not be identified by the use of names or initials in any reports of the completed study. All research

documents will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office at the University of British Columbia. Computer data files will be encrypted, and password protected.

Compensation

You will be provided with a \$150 gift card prior to the beginning the sharing circle process. You will be compensated for your travel, if required for your participation in the research.

Responsibilities of the Research Team

As researchers undertaking this research project with the Office of the Wet'suwet'en we will follow the four R's of Indigenous research methodologies: respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility. We commit to value the diverse knowledges of the individuals, cultures and communities involved in the research. We will involve the advisory group and the participants throughout the research process to make sure the research is relevant to the needs and dreams of the Wet'suwet'en community. We acknowledge that research is a two-way process and will ensure that both the community and the research team benefit. We are responsible to enact the principles respect, relevance and reciprocity, and will reflexively examine all perspectives (particularly our own) during the process.

Contact for Information about the Study

If you have any questions or would like more information about this study, you may contact Dr. Marla Buchanan (Principal Investigator), Sarah Panofsky (Co-Investigator), or Gretchen Woodman (Office of the Wet'suwet'en representative).

Contact for Concerns About the Rights of Research Subjects

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics.

Consent

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice of any kind.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

Participant Signature

Date

Printed Name of the Participant signing above

I agree to be contacted in the future for research participation in similar studies by the same researcher.

Initials: _____ Date: _____

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study

Appendix C Research Agreement

Office of the Wet'suwet'en and University of British Columbia, Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education

Wet'suwet'en Wellness and Indigenous Focusing Oriented Therapy January 28, 2020

University of British Columbia (UBC) Research Team members:

Dr. Marla Buchanan, Professor
Sarah Panofsky, MA student

Office of the Wet'suwet'en (OW) Advisory Group members:

Neekupdeh, Daren George
Wilat, Sue Alfred
Madeek, Jeff Brown
Smogelgem, Warner Naziel
Gretchen Woodman, Clinical Advisor

UBC research team and OW Advisory Group members agree to conduct the Wet'suwet'en wellness and Indigenous Focusing Oriented Therapy (IFOT) research project with the following understandings:

1 The purpose of this research project is:

- 1.1 Support the OW in the use of IFOT to bring health, reconciliation, and unity to the nation.
- 1.2 Explore IFOT.
- 1.3 Address the research gap of collaborative and culturally relevant research regarding trauma and healing in Indigenous communities.

2 The research question is:

How is IFOT shaped by Wet'suwet'en worldviews and how is it mobilized at the level on individuals, families, house groups and the nation.

3 The research team commits to adhere to the four R's of Indigenous methodologies (responsibility, reciprocity, relevance and respect) and to follow the following framework outlined by Dr. Margaret Kovach (2010), who is of Plains Cree and Saulteaux ancestry and an Associate Professor at the University of Saskatchewan:

- 3.1 UBC research team will critically reflect on their roles, actions, assumptions, and relationships.
- 3.2 The Wet'suwet'en Advisory Group and the UBC Research Team will collaboratively guide the process, following the 'anuc niwh'it'.
- 3.3 The research will be situated within Wetsuwet'en ikuk nu'at'en, language, history, storytelling, territory, songs and Wellness Framework.
- 3.4 Ethical review will be completed through UBC Ethics.

3.5 The Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs will approve all documents before they are published or shared in community.

3.6 Participants will give verbal and written informed consent prior to engaging in the research and will have the choice to withdraw from the project at any time.

3.7 Stories will be central to the research and be considered a gift.

3.8 The research will serve the Wet'suwet'en community.

4 Indigenous methodologies and narrative inquiry will be the methodologies used for the research, highlighting the conversational method of storytelling in data collection and analysis.

5 Methods to be used are:

5.1 Sharing circle process including process including three phases: (a) an analysis of how IFOT principles are aligned with or divergent from Wet'suwet'en worldviews; (b) story construction of IFOT experiences, and (c) stories sharing and collaborative interpretation of salient themes.

6 Participants will be 6-8 Wet'suwet'en members who have completed the IFOT training and are representative of the diversity of this group.

6.1 Participants will be invited to participate by the Advisory Group. The Research Team will follow-up with an introductory meeting including informed consent and project details.

6.2 Participants will choose whether they wish to remain anonymous.

7 The research findings will be compiled in Sarah Panofsky's thesis, articles to be published in journals, and conference presentations.

7.1 The Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs will approve the thesis, articles, and presentations prior to completion.

7.1 Participants and the Advisory Group will co-author publications and presentations.

7.2 Copyright will be determined by the Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs.

7.3 An Advisory Group member or participant will be invited to present, alongside the Research Team, at a conference when the research is shared.

7.4 The research will be shared with the wider Wet'suwet'en community at clan meetings.

7.5 The research may be shared with service providers on Wet'suwet'en Territory upon direction by the Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs

8 The Research Team has applied for funding through the Vancouver Foundation.

8.1 This funding will provide honoraria to Advisory Group members, travel for the Advisory Group, Research Team, and participants, a salary to Sarah Panofsky, materials, and catering.

8.2 The funding decision will be given in June 2020.

9 The Research Team and Advisory Group agree to carry-out the research in the spring/summer of 2020.

Signed by:

University of British Columbia

Office of the Wet'suwet'en

Dr. Marla Buchanan
Position: Professor
January 24, 2020

Name:
Position:
Date:

Sarah Panofsky
Position: MA Student
January 24, 2020

Name:
Position:
Date:

Name:
Position:
Date:

Name:
Position:
Date:

Name:
Position:
Date:

Appendix D Sharing Circle Package

May 20, 2020

Hadih,

Geeya/de' geeya/nay/wil/nik – Research is storytelling

Thank you for your participation in this project.

Our research question asks: **How is IFOT shaped by Wet'suwet'en worldviews and mobilized at the level of individuals, families, house groups and the nation?**

Our hope is that this research support will support the integration of IFOT throughout the Wet'suwet'en Nation and help to meet the need for decolonizing research on trauma interventions with Indigenous peoples that use an Indigenous approach.

I wish to acknowledge and thank Smogelgem, Madeek, Wil'at, Neekupdeh, and Gretchen Woodman who make up the advisory group and my supervisor, Dr. Marla Buchanan and committee members, Dr. Alanaise Goodwill and Dr. Jan Hare who create the backbone for this project. Thank you also to Shirley Turcotte for her collaboration.

In particular, I wish to acknowledge and thank Wil'at, and Delores Alfred for the Wet'suwet'en translation included in this document and throughout the research process.

I look forward to undertaking this journey with you.

Misih,

Sarah Panofsky

*A note on the written language: the Wetsuwet'en language has 7 vowels which can be difficult to understand when written. The translation uses, instead, English vowels and consonants. You can read them as their sounds. Long words have been broken up with a (/). The (') is a glottal or quick stop as if someone is poking you in the stomach as you are saying the word.

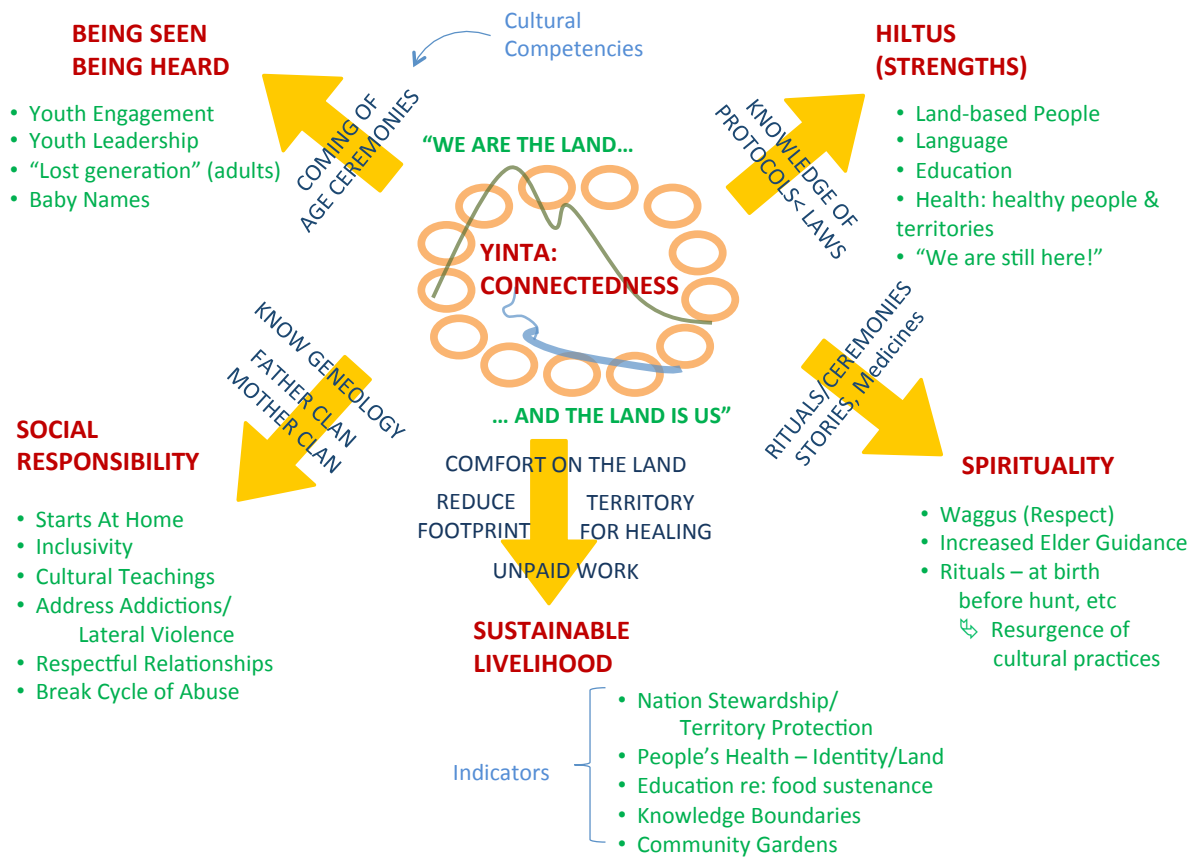
Sharing Circle 1

How are IFOT Principles Aligned with and Divergent from Wet'suwet'en Worldviews?

Wet'suwet'en Wellness Conceptual Framework ©

(Note: to be used only with explicit permission from the Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs)

www.wetsuweten.com



Indigenous Focusing Oriented Therapy

Developed by Shirley Turcotte and colleagues and adapted from Eugene Gendlin's Focusing

A strengths-based, culturally aligned and historically situated therapy process.

IFOT is **decolonizing** - *niwh juh/de'nee jena duhnee henlih' hots nez/tah/dilh*: it attends to and challenges historical oppression at the root of complex trauma. Resilience comes along with the experiencing of oppression; experiencing intergenerational **trauma holds the wisdom necessary for all my relations past, present, and future** - *neets he/dilh, kiy he/dilh/nee, lha nish/tat/dilh/nee dee/d'ah/nee a nook nowh' aden hayoont'an*.

IFOT meets complex trauma from “**all my relations**” - *dee d'ah nee*: everything is animate, connected and interconnected across time and space, through the generations, and can be drawn upon for wisdom and direction.

IFOT is **collective** - *juh' nayna halh deggh*: complex trauma in an Indigenous context is deep and relational. A person's experience of trauma may be layered with the experiences of their families and communities across generations, shaped by colonization, particularly of Indian Residential Schools and the Child Welfare system. An individual's trauma is not all theirs and they are not alone in their experience of it.

The **felt sense** - *geeya/de' juh' nina halh deggh nowh nay gghen/nay/wil/tsuk* in IFOT is “a bodily experience of interconnected emotion, energy and sensations that are an expression of knowledge of collective experiences through time” (Turcotte). A felt sense has a certain bodily quality, that is connected to intergenerational wisdom and the land when observed and tracked.

IFOT is **intergenerational** - *njena juh'nuh/ziz/deggh. Nowh huz skak juh nay/deen/deggh k'i jeen*: conversations with ancestors, and with all beings the client is in relationship with, come through the body to enter therapy.

IFOT **leans into the land** - *Nowh yinta' hida'ts hetdilh*: the land can hold the trauma and medicines can be drawn upon for healing.

Circular Process of Trauma Focused Asking

IFOT follows the **six stages of focusing**: clearing space, felt sense, handle, resonating, asking, and receiving.

Safety Questions:

- *Is it okay to be with this right now?
- *What do you need to do to help yourself be with this more easily?
- *Is it okay to give this some more space?
- *Is it okay to spend some time being curious with this?
- *Is there more you need to be able to sit with this gently?
- *Can you allow the best of you to keep company with this place?
- *How can you get comfortable there where it is so uncomfortable?

Crux Questions

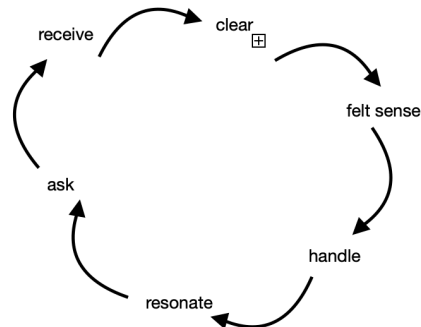
- *If this place could speak what would it say?
- *How are you in there about all of that?
- *Is there more?
- *What is the worst of that?
- *What gets you the most about that?
- *What is it about the whole problem that makes you so _____?
- *What is so _____ about that?
- *Is this familiar?
- *When do you first remember sensing something like that?
- *Is there something you or it needs to say?
- *How old is it there in that place?
- *Is this all yours?
- *Who else is there?

Forward Moving Questions

- *What is new about what this place is telling you?
- *What does this place say it needs to be okay?
- *What is one small action you can take that will make a difference for you?
- *What does this place need?
- *Which way is fresh air?
- *How is this like your life?
- *How is this related to your life right now?

Closing Questions

- *What does that spot need to close for today?
- *Where do you need to place that issue for now?
- *Is there something in nature that may be helpful to you?
- *Are you all the way back?



Questions for the Group

- How does IFOT align with “Yinta: Connectedness”?
- How does IFOT fit with ‘Being Seen, Being Heard”, “Hiltus”, “Spirituality”, “Social Responsibility”, and “Sustainable Livelihood”?
- How does IFOT work with the cultural competencies?
- How do you apply IFOT in the Wet’suwet’en context differently than other Indigenous communities might? What makes IFOT in the Wet’suwet’en context distinct?
- Have you experienced any ‘stickiness’ or discomfort in using IFOT personally or professionally?
- What are some of the practical interventions that have worked well for you?

Sharing Circle 2
Share your Story - Geeya/day/deh' lha/nis/ewlh/yilh

**Between the first two sharing circles please spend some time thinking about the IFOT stories you wish to share with the group. Because of our Zoom process you will have 8-10 minutes to speak to make the most of our time together.*

We wish to learn about the depth and breadth of IFOT in the Wet'suwet'en community. Possible story starters:

- When I was first learning IFOT...
- I have seen IFOT change me/my family/my community/my house group/my nation...
- IFOT gives me strength by...
- Describe the process of learning IFOT.
- Describe how it is to work with IFOT with another.

Story Notes

While you listen to the stories of others, please take notes about themes. What connections, agreements, and commonalities do you see?

**After the session please take a picture of your notes and text or email it to Sarah at*

Sharing Circle 3

Interpretation of Stories - Geeya/deh' njena nee/ohs/t'en geeya/day/deh' enlee

Connections, like the togetherness of language and land
Nowh kanik lha nowh yintah' alhka honlee

- What connections, commonalities, and agreements do you see in the stories?
- What's important?
- Is there a link between IFOT and self-determination? Nation-building?
- What are strengths and challenges of using IFOT within the Wet'suwet'en Nation?
- Is there a relationship between IFOT and reconciliation?
- Describe any problems or issues with implementing IFOT in your community.
- Describe any recommendations and changes that you would like to see with IFOT in your community.

Misih

We will be in touch when the results are written-up for your feedback and approval.