MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew

UNEARTHING SPIRIT: INDIGENOUS APPROACH TO DOCUMENTARY MEDIA

by

Jules Arita Koostachin

B.F.A., Concordia University, 1996
M.F.A., Ryerson University, 2010

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The following individuals certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies for acceptance, the dissertation entitled:

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**Examining Committee:**

Dr. Jan Hare, Indigenous Education, UBC
Supervisor

Dr. Charles Menzies, Anthropology, UBC
Supervisory Committee Member

Dr. Tasha Hubbard, Native Studies, UAlberta
Supervisory Committee Member

Dr. Dory Nason, First Nations & Indigenous Studies, UBC
University Examiner

Dr. Candis Callison, Journalism, UBC
University Examiner
Abstract

*MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit*, a *MoshKeKo AsKi InNiNeWak* (Swampy Cree) framework explores ways in which our positionality as Indigenous documentarians enables a comprehensive understanding and awareness of story. I employed systems of knowledge of my Ancestral lands to develop a theory to contribute to the study of *visual sovereignty*, the protection and protocols when working with Indigenous story. My research consisted of the study of Indigenous documentary discourse and explores the role of Indigenous cultural experiences and positionality in documentary practices and how it leads to the development of concepts of story, protocols, and Indigenous identity. My study advances my framework as a pedagogical model in academia but is much more than a model to be dissected; it is a way of life for the *InNiNeWak*. It also addresses the significance of Indigenous documentary practices when engaging with our communities and stories. The focus of this inquiry engages with how Indigenous documentary requires an extensive exploration of the influence of modality, creative range, and experience on methodologies. My research examines how positionality shapes the creative process as documentarians engage with core concepts, themes, and forms. An inquiry process was set in an Indigenous research paradigm that privileges the research considered and utilized scholarship regarding Indigenous research methodologies and storytelling, acknowledging that Indigenous representation shapes and contributes to Indigenous documentary theory.
Lay Summary

*MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit* explores how positionality, creative range and experience influence the methodologies of Indigenous documentarians. Research took place on the University of British Columbia (UBC) campus, situated on the traditional, Ancestral, and unceded lands of Musqueam peoples. Findings illustrate the commonalities within the diverse and expansive Indigenous approach to documentary media. Furthermore, the research suggests that our positionality as Indigenous documentarians does indeed shape our methodological processes, and how we approach Indigenous story.
Preface

This dissertation is original work by the author, Jules Arita Koostachin. I designed, conducted, analyzed, and represented the program of research with the guidance of my committee. The research received approval from the University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board, Certificate number H17-00960-A001.
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APTN</td>
<td>Aboriginal People Television Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBC</td>
<td>Canadian Broadcast Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISO</td>
<td>Indigenous Screen Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NFB</td>
<td>National Film Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>UBC</td>
<td>The University of British Columbia</td>
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Glossary

Asivak: Spider

Chi Mii’Kwetch: Big thanks

Indigenous Systems of Knowledge: I am acknowledging that each Indigenous group has its own philosophies, epistemologies, pedagogies, and ontologies.

InNiNew: A human being from MoshKeKo AsKi

InNiNeWak: Human Beings

InNiNiMoWin: The language of the Human Beings

IsKoTew: Fire

IskWew KaToKoNahk IsKoTeNo: Woman who holds Fire

IsKwew: Cree woman

Mahiigan: Wolf

MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew: The Unearthing of Spirit

MosKeKoWok: The Ancestral lands of the MoshKeKo AsKi Crees

OkiMaw: Leader

PaWaKen: Dreamer or one who brings celebration

PoWaMeWin: Dream

TapWeWin: Speaking truth

Turtle Island: How Indigenous People refer to what is now called North America

Utilizing the English language: I was raised by InNiNiMoWin (Cree) speaking family members, and therefore it is important to note that when I use the English language for the purpose of writing this dissertation, I am referencing and attempting to share an InNiNeWak framework within the confines of a colonial language.
Acknowledgements

My first acknowledgement is to the dimensional spirits of the lands, waters, and other realms of the Coast Salish peoples. I acknowledge that I am an InNiNew guest here, and I am creating, working, and living my life on these Ancestral lands. Chi Mii’kwetch for sharing these healing landscapes and the waters with my family and I, we are forever grateful for the nurturing we have received over the years. I am also thankful for the support of my four sons Asivak (Spider), Mahiigan (Wolf) and my twins Tapwewin (Truth Speaker) and Pawaken (Dreamer). I am also thankful for my partner Jake, who has also been incredibly supportive during the process of my studies, and I am forever grateful that we are on this academic journey together.

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**InNiNeWak Cultural Advisors:** My children Asivak, Mahiigan, Tapwewin and Pawaken, my mother Rita Okimawininew and my dear friend Christopher Hunter.
Chapter 1: Introduction

*MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit*

During my studies, I learned of an Inuk woman, 18 years of age, named Nancy Columbia: a documentarian who preceded the infamous Robert Flaherty by 11 years. Unfortunately, there are limited documents, journals, and articles regarding Columbia’s work, even though she was a renowned Inuk performer, *documentarian*, and filmmaker. Columbia’s earlier film work challenges the colonial *history* (italicized to emphasize the erasure of their/her stories) of documentary. She was documented as writing the treatment and starred in the Selig Polyscope Company film, a pioneering Chicago Venture, entitled *The Way of the Eskimo* in 1911. Regrettably, the film was destroyed in a fire. It played to a wide audience, and it was shot on the shores of Lake Michigan (Harper “Nancy Columbia,” 2014). I deem it necessary for my dissertation to commence by acknowledging Nancy Columbia’s journey as one of the first recognized Indigenous documentarians, reframing the gendered male-centric settler colonial narrative-characterizing documentary as a whole. Her film -- although she is neither credited, nor was it considered as a *documentary* at the time of its release -- was a short dramatic thriller about an Inuit ceremony of bidding the sun. In recognizing Nancy Columbia, I am also paying homage to Indigenous women who have also created significant work without much acknowledgment. I am honoured to follow in her footsteps and be an inheritor of her practice as an Indigenous documentarian.

My quest for knowledge regarding protocols in relation to Indigenous narrative in documentary was inspired by my need to understand how and why we work with Indigenous accounts of truth. I consider documentary to be a mode of research, and a means to combine my cultural understanding with my documentary process. When I first started my PhD studies in
2015, I sat with my mother. Her first language is InNiNiMoWin (Swampy Cree), and she was born on the MoshKeKo AsKi, our Ancestral lands. My mother carries the stories of our people in her heart, spirit, and mind, and although her life has been deeply impacted by the residential school system, she continues to live her life according to our InNiNeWak teachings. One day, I asked my mother about our old stories, ones that were no longer spoken about, and she quickly reminded me that that they are always with us in spirit. I understood what she meant when she spoke of spirit; my understanding is that we are all part of the same narrative – connected spiritually. Indeed, colonialism has severed Indigenous people from many of our old stories, but our teachings tell us that our stories are alive and connect us with the spiritual realm. Elder Louis Bird (2007), also from MoshKeKo AsKi and a friend of my late MoShoom, asserts that “a story never begins and never ends” and our stories were created out of the their/his/herstories (I am acknowledging the diversity of Indigenous gender identities/expressions beyond the colonial binary) of our people (Bird, 2007, p. 52). Our stories live in our mind, our dreams, our breath, our flesh and bones and in the words, we choose to speak – story lives in the land, the waters, the plants, and through the animals. Story connects us to each other and to our Ancestors.

Essentially, we are all part of the same story, we are just telling it in our own unique way. We are the roots of the same tree; sadly, some are damaged or even broken, but there are others that continue to grow strong. MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew, which translates to Unearthing Spirit, remind us of the time, care, and consideration, especially with the stories informed by the lived experiences of our Ancestors, they require us to share with the upmost respect.

As an InNiNew IsKwew (Swampy Cree woman) who works as a documentarian in what is now called Canada, I am often asked how we should respectfully approach a community regarding sharing stories through the methods of representation in documentary. I have learned
through respective community Elders and Knowledge Keepers that every community is different in terms of protocol and storytelling processes. As a documentarian, I have had to navigate diverse cultural understandings and Indigenous knowledge protocols even before I commence production, perhaps as other documentarians do as well. This experience of working in the field has prompted important questions in respect to how Indigenous documentarians approach stories.

As scholar Pamela Wilson (2016) highlights, Indigenous documentary is a form of media representation that privileges Indigeneity, while working to preserve and sustain cultural knowledge and ways of being. Indigenous documentary is appreciated worldwide for its ability to create a necessary space for meaningful exchange and dialogue. “Indigenous media studies have developed as an interdisciplinary academic field in the past few decades, bridging scholarship in anthropology, media studies, communication, cultural geography, and other related disciplines” (Wilson p. 89). Documentary provides evidence, communicates, informs, and challenges settler paradigms by archiving their/his/herstories for adjacent generations.

In my research, I examine how documentary has allowed for a deeper understanding and awareness of Indigeneity. My study fosters academic advances in the comprehension of the cultural complexities associated with our creative expression as Indigenous documentarians. The goal of my research is to examine the protocols of significant contributions made by five (5) selected Indigenous documentarians based in and around the Vancouver area, and provide a comprehensive analysis of their practices and methodologies. My research also explores Indigenous documentary from the late 60s, when the National Film Board of Canada initiated programs specifically for Indigenous documentarians. I have also included a reflexive self-analysis of my own selected documentary work. This examination of Indigenous documentary considers innovative documentarians known for experimenting with varied documentary media.
forms. Through an examination of practices of Indigenous documentarians and a reflexive self-analysis of my own contributions in this research, I reveal an InNiNeWak framework:

MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit further defined later in this chapter. Through the course of my research, my framework developed into a pedagogical tool, weaving together an InNiNeWak ethos with interested experts in the field, whereby I explore the interaction of theory and practice by examining the documentary practice of selected Indigenous documentarians as the basis of my dissertation study.

MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit is deeply rooted in theory and frames my thesis. Throughout my studies it has become more refined, and the support of Indigenous narrative protocol and practices added to my understanding. This thesis contributes to the growing scholarship on decolonizing documentary theory by determining how Indigenous documentaries expose national histories, allowing Indigenous subjects of inquiry to speak for themselves, and underscoring Indigenous experiences through an intimate style that meshes personal and community voices. In addition, I examine the shift in media that comprises of Indigenous documentary, including the production of a greater range of creative multi-modal platforms. Through questions about the positionality, methods, contribution, and our roles and responsibilities as Indigenous documentarians, I generate supplementary knowledge concerning our creative, political, and cultural influences on the industry. I have also developed an exploration of Indigenous documentary methodologies, providing an InNiNeWak framework to parse the parallels between Indigenous documentary and storytelling practice. By researching the relationship between Indigenous ways of knowing and documentary theory and practices, I have also developed a deeper comprehension of how the Indigenous epistemological approach to narrative is fundamental in understanding how documentary has informed our lives.
Secondly, my doctoral research study contributes to theoretical debates around Indigenous narrative in the disciplines of Indigenous storytelling and decolonizing documentary. My research reveals how Indigenous documentary engages audiences by challenging the single narrative of Indigenous people, and hence triggers self-reflection by providing viewers a broader understanding of the diversity of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous documentarians carry the knowledge to address how our lives can be respectfully and appropriately represented in media. To that end, my research addresses the following question: *How does our positionality as Indigenous documentarians shape our creativity and the concepts, themes, and forms explored in the works we produce?* In addressing this central research question, I honour my creative practice as a storyteller and my expertise as an Indigenous documentarian.

In light of the their/his/herstory of documentary, an effective integrated approach to documentary methods is to (1) be consistent with and supportive of Indigenous knowledge systems; (2) address colonialism; and (3) have a firm grounding in Indigenous methodology. Methods of data collection have proven useful in providing significant information regarding potential creative processes and outcomes of how my framework influences documentary practice. As we look at ways to interpret approaches to Indigenous stories through multi-modalities, this study provides insight into how documentarians might respectfully facilitate the process.

1.1 Background of the Study

My doctoral study took place over the span of five years, while I still work in the film and television industry. As a documentarian, I am well aware of the problems that arise in the industry, especially in relation to the misrepresentation and the exploitation of Indigenous
peoples and our stories. My research study takes place in what is now called Canada, a country known as a forerunner in documentary practice and recognized as the place where colonial (aka traditional) documentary emerged. John Grierson broke ground worldwide as the founder of the National Film Board of Canada in 1939, during the Second World War. Grierson was a pupil of Robert Flaherty, known as the architect of documentary; Grierson was a central figure in establishing documentary in Canada and on an international scale, and the first to develop documentary theory (Silver, 2010 “The films of Robert Flaherty”). Robert Flaherty, creator of the notorious and acclaimed film Nanook of the North (1922) is also recognized around the world as the first ethnographic documentarian. Today, John Grierson is understood now as being relaxed in terms of defining documentary, his early definition of documentary considering Flaherty’s work as ‘the creative treatment of actuality’ (Rotha 1967 p. 70). But one needs to be mindful of the technological limitation of his time. Documentary theory has evolved over the years and scholars are more concerned with the notion of positionality, as well as the modal-fluidity of documentary and the influence of ever-changing technology.

1.2 Situating the Author

My journey as a storyteller started back in the 1980s as a theater actor based in Ottawa, Ontario. My artistic expression was deeply influenced by Indigenous storytellers working with the National Film Board, and, also, Indigenous led theatre projects where productions were focused on recovering and sustaining cultural values, all the while challenging tropes and misrepresentation. As a young person in the arts, I found refuge working with other Indigenous artists facing similar challenges; it seemed as though we were battling the same fight. Indigenous artists were strategically centering Indigenous story by reclaiming narratives encoded in our values, and principles.
In the 1990s, I moved to Montreal, Quebec for university shortly after the Oka crisis. It was a trying time for many Indigenous people in Canada, but we banded together through our advocacy, activism, and our varied arts practices. At the same time, I was involved with the Native Theatre School program in Toronto, Ontario. During this phase of my career, I met artists who shared similar stories about working in the mainstream – there was definitely a deep desire to tell our own stories on our own terms. Much of our time together was spent discussing the future of Indigenous arts in all its forms. Twenty plus years later, many of those ideas we discussed have thankfully transpired through the next generation of artists. The changes in the industry over the last several decades can be attributed to the work of Indigenous artists, academics, activists, and a multitude of practitioners in other fields.

In regard to the field of documentary, I have witnessed a shift in media production particular to Indigenous story; Indigenous storytellers found themselves delving into a wide range of media platforms with the potential to reach a wider audience. Note that the use of the term *storyteller* throughout this dissertation is to acknowledge that we are essentially all storytellers and many of us have chosen to explore varied platforms. Many Indigenous storytellers move between platforms with ease and fluidity, such as Loretta Todd, Gregory Coyes, Dorothy Christian, and Zacharias Kunuk. Documentarians are moving away from the single narrative – incomplete story – and extending the dialogue beyond settler colonial paradigms highlighting contemporary ideas of Indigeneity. They also address commodification and the dehumanization of Indigenous peoples in westernized documentary practices.

As documentarians, we wholeheartedly understand the impact of misrepresentation that exists in our fields of practice because we are living it, and many of us are still working to decolonize the industry.
Indigenous filmmakers tell their stories, whether actual or mythical, using a variety of filming and editing techniques. The strong stylistic or generic delineation between documentary and feature films found in mainstream Western cinema is not as pronounced or important in indigenous filmmaking. (Wilson 2016 p. 90)

There is a strong need to share Indigenous stories from our own lens. All over the globe, Indigenous peoples are working towards self-determination, which was never relinquished; scholar Dian Million (2013) posits that the majority of Canadians carry limited understanding of Indigenous peoples, their diversity, and their cultures (p. 4). As a result, mainstream media barely engages with authentic (truthful and diverse) Indigenous content, and if they do it is through a colonial lens that works to exclude Indigenous participation. We are not static as a people, and we carry our knowledge with us in story. We, therefore, claim our stories through our documentary practices. Million (2014) reminds us that “Indigenism is to define ourselves, rather than to be defined, and it is an act of doing” (p. 38). Storytelling is a profound act of doing and important way to experience the world and narrative is a way to enculture their/her/history. Million argues that “Our voices are still positioned in a particular way, definitely reminiscent of the past silences we know so well, contingent to our past” (Million 2013 p. 57). Documentarians are finding new and innovative ways of exploring our collective their/his/herstories and passing along stories that promote social cohesion.

Through media, we have mobilized our voices on an international scale, and we continue to take action. By speaking our truth, we are exposing the silenced histories of the past, and in turn, offering an exploration of cultural identity and innovative forms of artistic expression. Documentary has become important in that we are speaking for ourselves and informing future generations. It consistently interferes with the colonial system by upholding our community
voices. In telling what really happened through our documentary work, it mobilizes documentarians and informs productions of truth. Furthermore, the evolution of documentary theory has allowed Indigenous documentarians a significant starting point to understanding Indigenous their/his/herstories and contemporary realities, offering a necessary reference point and addressing the importance of positionality in relation to our diverse truths.

Indeed, documentary can offer an inside look at events, relationships, and situations, but there will always be a boundary between the subject/s and representation – the documentary is representing the truth. Bruzzi (2002) states that “documentary film can never offer a representation of real events indistinguishable from the events themselves, although theory has not yet come to terms with the value of such a realization” (p. 74). Indeed, the filmic process disrupts upon the reality of the world it is documenting, but I argue that there is power in the translation of Indigenous knowledge into a documentary form, especially if the documentarian is Indigenous. They are centering the Indigenous subject/story and replacing the story of other with an accurate representation. Our story warriors - Indigenous documentarians were at the frontlines while others were working behind the scenes. These trailblazers opened doors for the next generation, such as Lisa Jackson, Tracy German, the late Trudy Stewart, and me, to name a few. We would not be where we are today without the documentary Elders and Knowledge Keepers who paved the way for us today. Mainstream media has rarely given Indigenous stories the coverage they deserve, and when it did, we were faced with problematic representation of Indigenous realities. In many ways, Indigenous documentarians instigated an alternative way of confronting settler colonialism by personalizing testimonies to convey a necessary truth, and they have also been successful in collecting stories for adjacent generations. Indigenous documentary can be understood as an archive, and it is through our documentaries that we bring
the past to the present. The power stems in the journey of remembering, making, and sharing story through the personal and cultural accounts of the subject/s we engage with. The process of bringing to light Indigenous narratives is healing, empowering, and I would argue instrumental in societal change.

When I was younger, working as an actor in Toronto, I was well aware that I was taking part in a national movement of Indigenous self-representation. Documentarians were actively altering the world in which we worked, created, and lived in – one day at a time, and one project at a time. As the years passed, I found myself working at *Native Voices* magazine, led by actor/musician Gary Farmer, and we were publishing stories by Indigenous writers about Indigenous artists. Soon after, in 1992, Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN), the first Indigenous broadcaster in Canada, was conceived, and continues to provide opportunities for us to tell the stories that truly reflect who we are (Hafsteinsson 2014 p. 16). Television programs on APTN share stories that are important to us as Indigenous people, and the network is one of a kind in terms of national Indigenous programming. Kristin Dowell (2013) states:

> The Aboriginal Peoples Television Network adds another complex layer to the discussion about Aboriginal visual sovereignty. As a national broadcaster in Canada, APTN is connected to the mainstream Canadian mediascape; at the same time, it is a vital institution for representing Aboriginal stories and experiences to all Canadians,

> Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. (p. 77)

It is through sharing our stories that we develop a deeper understanding of each other. Through Indigenous programming we will “introduce Canadians to the Aboriginal foundations of their own country, and provide a badly-needed mirror, reflecting indigenous peoples to themselves through the eyes of their own writers, directors, journalists and performers” (David 2012 p. 117).
My career in the arts was enhanced with the birth of APTN, and in 2001 I found myself a co-host of a series called *Cooking with the Wolfman* with David Wolfman, which sparked my transition into film and television. While, in the early 2000s Indigenous people were still faced with mainstream misrepresentation, in terms of the problematic single narrative or as some refer to as incomplete stories, and though unfortunately we still are today, there has been a significant shift. Our activism and our resistance are creating positive and meaningful changes in the film and television industry.

*MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit* – *a methodological approach to story* - was not fully articulated until much later on, when I heard an Elder speak in 2009 – this was my second semester of graduate school. I was invited to share the very early stages of my research at a conference at Trent University. There, an Elder spoke to the significance of Indigenous truth, and he also spoke to the spirit of our stories, explaining how our stories are alive – just as my mother did. The Elder told us that as storytellers we are obligated to uphold the spirit of story and honour the essence of the stories we choose to share. I unfortunately do not recall this Elder’s name, but he was a significant person on my path of understanding the importance of Indigenous storytelling methodologies. Furthermore, his notion of choice welcomed a new understanding. His teachings supported the idea that as Indigenous storytellers we had choice in our storytelling process and need not share everything – some stories are sacred. My mother echoed the same teaching, we must act as though our relations are always watching us and be considerate. Anishnawbe scholar Winona LaDuke (2005), explains that our sacredness (spiritual ways of being) reasserts the relationships between creation and humans and through our thankfulness, we connect to all creation (p. 15). It is through our spiritual practices and through storytelling, which are intertwined, that we can reconnect with ourselves and affirm a personal
and collective identity. Sto:lo scholar Jo-ann Archibald (2008) states that “stories have the power to make our hearts, minds, bodies, and spirits work together” (p. 12). The idea of reconnecting to the self and to our communities by actively engaging or listening to story transformed my understanding of the power of spirituality, reminded me of my roots, and how coming together to share relates to the practice of storytelling.

Interestingly, the idea of having choice was also empowering, in mass media we are often left on the sidelines as people outside of our communities make choices for us regarding representation. We interpret our stories differently than outsiders coming into our communities, and we all perceive story based on our own lived experience. This was a moment of clarity for me as a storyteller, and later as a documentarian; the Elder and my mother were both articulating something that I had always understood. Story is alive, and I soon realized that the stories of my own family carry agency. “The story is a living thing, an organic process, a way of life” (Graveline, 1998, p. 66). The teachings about Indigenous story resonated so deeply with me, and now I feel as though story lives through me – it flows and continues to move through the generations and now through my research. Ranjan Datta (2018) concurs, she states, “My stories are practice; they are very much alive. My stories always remind me of who I am” (p. 38). Storytelling is where we can connect with each other and is significant in protecting Indigenous knowledge.

My grandparents’ stories continue to guide me through my life, and I believe that they will do the same for my children, and possibly move through the generations long after I am gone. I’ve been taught and guided by my Elders that our stories are sacred, and they transcend both time and space. Our stories keep us connected as a people, and they also inform us when we are feeling lost or alone. We need our stories to feel connected to each other and to our Ancestral
lands, and our stories empower and uphold our Indigenous knowledge systems (Iseke, 2013, p. 568). Today, we find ourselves at a critical moment in time because there are growing opportunities to explore and share stories with communities outside of their own.

Increasingly, funds are becoming more readily available for our projects, allowing for opportunity to counter colonial stories of Indigenous realities, and fortunately the general public is starting to engage with Indigenous led documentary more often. According to Clifford and Selinger (1992), they state:

These Native filmmakers return to and repatriate ‘old stories’, relocating ethnographic practices and Hollywood discourses to Native nations through visual representation of storytelling as a social practice. They expose the ‘fables of rapport’ which have concealed the production situations, ethnographer/informant relationships and recording and filmmaking apparatus that characterized early ethnographic and popular representations. (p. 40)

Western documentary creates images of Indigeneity from the point of view of non-Indigenous documentarians, and often, stories were told with an authoritative male didactic voice. These kinds of documentary perpetuated an idea of us as exotic others. On the other hand, performing significant cultural and ideological work, changing the attitudes of settlers toward Indigeneity and deconstructing disempowering mechanisms (Marubbio & Buffalohead 2013 p. 10). Indigenous documentaries centre on change and create spaces for artistic exploration. Indigenous documentary is a strategy to reformulate representation in a variety of new and exciting ways.

Documentarians push the boundaries by creating significant work regarding our lived experiences that resonate on an international scale – we have an audience, and we always have. For example, *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (2001) although not considered a documentary, yet a
relevant example, is known as the best Canadian film and received international acclaim with an all Inuit cast and crew, and a story from over a 1000 years ago – a story based on one of their ancient legends. Joanne Hearne (2006) claims that film recreates an old story deeply embedded in Inuit storytelling tradition and that has been told hundreds of times (p. 324). The film emphasizes the communicability of Inuit culture, and I would argue that it is the Inuit narrative structure that made the film an international success. According to Michael Evans (2010):

Some reviews of the film focused on its approach to educating audiences about Inuit culture and life in the Arctic. Rather than introduce audiences to central facets of Inuit culture one at a time, making sure each piece is solid before moving on, Kunuk and Cohn allow viewers to learn by observing the real-time unfolding of activities, habits, rhythms, and patterns around them. The approach can be bewildering at times, but the blending of narrative and cultural content affords viewers an immediate and visceral experience that transcends linear understanding. (p. 88)

Atanarjuat is an emotionally intense and compelling universal story that deals with humanity, relationships, crime, and pain. It is an epic cinematic film that speaks to Inuit identity and respectfully carried through with integrity. The international success of Atanarjuat is evidence that there is an audience for our stories. This film brings the discourse of ethnographic cinema into discussion with Inuit conceptions of orality, and the space of Indigenous film for exploring the significance of cultural production (Raheja 2013 p. 9). Orality is an evolving process, which is also apparent in Indigenous documentary, and which are extensions of our pasts into our lives today.

Over the years, the National Film Board (NFB) has been an instrumental force for Indigenous documentary. The NFB has produced works about Indigenous people since the 1940s
and has produced over 280 films by Indigenous-identified documentarians. The NFB has developed a plan to redefine its relationship with Indigenous peoples. The plan included ensuring that 15 percent of production spending is on Indigenous-directed projects (The Canadian Press, 2020). CBC reporter Duncan McCue tells us that Indigenous filmmakers got a boost with the creation of the Indigenous Screen Office and the National Film Board of Canada announced an increase to production spending to Indigenous-directed projects (McCue 2018). Lack of funding, social location, institutional ceilings, lack of access to power and personal connections have been identified as barriers to funding Indigenous films. Although we are moving in the right direction, we require more opportunities, accurate representations, and meaningful human connection to successfully navigate the film and television industry. There is more financing, opportunity, and access, but more is needed for equitable representation. The evolution of Indigenous documentary here in Canada has been a long time coming, drawing attention to Indigenous narratives through documentary emphasizing a visual literacy, enabling the understanding of the power of stereotypes and the significance of self-representation (Marubbio & Buffalohead 2013 p. 5). We are responding globally and are repositioning media articulation through the power of our collective voice. The world is becoming aware of our fight for recognition and movement toward autonomy. We are working toward breaking down preconceived notions of Indigeneity and radically decolonizing documentary, and promoting the right to represent ourselves and our their/his/herstories that reflect our cultural resiliency, strength, and sovereignty.

1.2 Research Outline

This doctoral study builds upon my two-year long Master thesis (2010), a feature documentary examining my journey of remembering my first language, *InNiNiMoWin* (Cree). The independent body of work was documentary-based, and the written thesis was submitted in
its entirety in Cree syllabics – the first thesis to be submitted in an Indigenous language at Ryerson University and to my knowledge across the country. My study addressed the impacts of genocide on the InNiNeWak (Cree) who have been systematically severed from their Ancestral language. Specifically, my research focused on the InNiNeWak of the MosKeKo AsKi (now called northern Ontario). My study also reflected upon the growing and changing perspectives on what constitutes present day InNiNeWak identities and examined new ideas and documentary approaches to sustain Indigenous languages. My research proved the success of Indigenizing different forms of media, including documentary. The preliminary research conducted for this project, prior to filming, explored both the urban and rural InNiNeWak (Cree) experiences in relation to sustaining InNiNiMoWin in present day and for adjacent generations.

Over the decades, Indigenous storytellers, specifically documentarians asserted culturally specific storytelling practices, especially in transposing our orality to written form for media platforms. By analyzing protocols and practices, they bring to light the restorative power of documentary as a storytelling platform. Scholars Eigenbrod and Hulan (2008) argue that “the power and significance of Aboriginal oral traditions reaches beyond the resistance to and transformation of written forms” (p. 11). We are moving beyond the written form, exploring orality with new experiential frames, and offering their own culture-specific perspective and experience to their documentary work. Dian Million (2014) suggests:

Stories become a collective story told across the lands—in poetry, in memoir, and in our new oral medium, the documentary. While there are differences between the personal story and the collective stories we tell, I believe that it was and is necessary for Indigenous peoples in North America to make new ways of seeing ascendant, to move to
shape the endless spin of the discourses in play, to act in a now to change the order. (p. 32)

Our stories stem from lived experiences, and act as a pathway to community healing. They are powerful because they articulate and interpret who we are as people.

As an Indigenous researcher, I am mindful of how many of the discourses that have shaped my study are grounded in colonial thought. I am also well aware that the colonial mindset of Canada continues to perpetuate myths about our national identity, settler-colonial relations and our shared their/his/herstories. I will address the colonial myths concerning Indigeneity throughout this research. Up to this time, cultural appropriation of our stories by mainstream media was common practice, even though we were vigorously resisting settler imagined notions of Indigeneity. Some of our stories are over thousands of years old as in the case with *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (2001), and storytelling practices such as documentary are relatively new, even though Indigenous peoples have been involved in ethnographic documentary since the 1800s, trapping Indigenous people in the past. “Despite the European American impulse to eradicate the Indian, Native Americans have still been influential in both North American mainstream and independent cinema since the inception of motion pictures in both obvious and less visible ways” (Raheja 2013 p. 37). Indigenous people have been calling into question the representation of Indigeneity by settlers, critiquing inaccurate portrayals and demanding change - reclamation. We have never been silent, according to scholars Sium and Ritskes (2013), “the storytellers and griots have never been idle, working through participatory mediums to maintain and sustain Indigenous ways of being and living” (p. V). In documentary, the story lives, develops, and is permeated with the relationships between documentarian, subject/s, and viewers. The story can only really exist within the relationship, and of course, the
audience – it is an act of sharing knowledge.

Moreover, Indigenous peoples are involved in both documentary and fiction film in roles ranging from actor, director and writer, to producer, but the purpose of this study is to remain focused on how we treat our stories. Therefore, in this study, I respectfully analyzed samples of selected works by the five (5) Indigenous documentarians I interviewed, and at the same time I analyzed a selection of my own documentary work. I felt it important to do so because of my experience working in the film industry and because of my educational background in documentary. More specifically, my experience as a documentarian; contributing to existing conversations in Indigenous documentary on process. I have several independently produced documentaries, and I recently released my third documentary with CBC. I am currently working towards developing my first feature documentary with the NFB, so I believe that my knowledge and experience in the field will lend itself to my research.

Furthermore, I explore knowledge shared with me in conversations with my colleagues who work in the industry alongside me. I am not comparing our practices, rather I respectfully explore ways in which we approach our documentary work. While I fully acknowledge that we have our own unique practices and styles, my research will focus more so on positionality, and the protocols one engages with during the creative process. Protocols are not fixed, and they vary from community to community. Indigenous documentary protocols are in place to support Indigenous documentarians to document stories and knowledge systems while safeguarding their interests and authority (Shankar 2010 p. 16). Documentary protocols and practices provide ethical ways of working with stories and using Indigenous methodologies in relation to documentary commences the development of Indigenous industry standards. Indigenous
documentary practices are mainly centred on cultural sustainability and the need to protect Indigenous story and cultural property rights.

An underlying goal of this study is to expand on my MA thesis on Indigenous media practices, which outlined a preliminary theoretical framework for Indigenous documentary. The purpose of this doctoral dissertation is to theorize a localized Indigenous framework (centralized within an InNiNeWak belief system) MooNaHaTihKaaSiiWew / Unearthing Spirit explores and discusses how our stories are the essence of our diverse ways of knowing, being and doing: how our stories are connected to our past, the land, and embodied in our beings, and how they guide our principles and our values. The overarching goals of this study are:

1. To provide a comprehensive analysis of Indigenous media literature/sources relating to our positionality as documentarians;

2. Document and analyze the functional, creative, and cultural processes for documentary by Indigenous documentarians.

My main research question is: How does our positionality as Indigenous documentarians shape our creativity, and the concepts, themes, and forms explored in documentary?

I also engage with the following sub-questions:

1. How does documentary deriving from Indigenous lived experience serve as a catalyst for colonial system change within Indigenous community and western mainstream media?

2. How will narratives produced by Indigenous documentarians reflect our positionality, roles, responsibilities, and methodologies?

3. How does our documentary work confront the colonial gaze?
4. How does unearthng our pre-settler truth – stories - reveal and strengthen our ties to our past, present and the future?

In light of the their/his/herstory of documentary, an effective integrated approach to documentary methods needs to be consistent with and supportive of Indigenous knowledge systems; address colonialism; and have a firm grounding in Indigenous methodology. My overarching goal is to examine how the cultural stories of Indigenous peoples determine their relationship to the storytelling practice. In meeting these objectives and research goals, I examine Indigenous storytelling and decolonizing documentary. I privilege Indigenous knowledge systems, research paradigms, methodologies, and methods in relation to documentary. Moreover, as an Indigenous scholar, I will be actively unpacking colonial theoretical frameworks while at the same time developing critical Indigenous theory about documentary. Indigenous scholars are balancing these two frameworks - Indigenous and colonial - and for the most part we are steering toward sovereign, self-determined academic journeys.

Also, my experience as a mid-career Indigenous documentarian informs my research. My work in the industry has been ongoing, even during my studies. I have accumulated many professional production credits, and these experiences have enhanced this study. I have placed myself in an insider/outsider relationship with selected participants involved in this study to ensure that I was objective when reflecting upon their conversations with me. Furthermore, I am adding another dimension to this research, that of an academic researcher, to the existing cultural relationships I have with my artistic community. Over the years, I have contributed to the film and television industry in several capacities, and my experiences have led me to the production of my current body of work.
1.3 Positionality

In positioning myself as both an *InNiNew* (Swampy Cree) researcher and as a documentarian, I recognize that my knowledge and expertise has been both shaped and interrupted by colonialism. My *InNiNeWak* relations (people of the Ancestral lands of the *MoshKeKo AsKi*), including my mother, a residential school warrior, inform my arts practice and how I approach the documentary process. Being the daughter of a residential school warrior was difficult, and I recall being a child in the 1970s when the residential school experience was only spoken about within the family. It was very confusing. My mother often shared horrific stories of her childhood with me, and when I tried to speak to her about it, I was often faced with her anger. We lived in extreme poverty and my mother’s broken English only allowed her to work labour-intensive jobs. She left residential school with a grade four level (colonial) education at the age of 16, but she knew how to survive on the land because her parents and her grandparents did.

Life was challenging for our family, and our relationship with the educational system was strained right from the beginning because of my mother’s traumatic experience. I am the first and to date only one in my family to pursue academia, and it has not been an easy journey. There have been times when I felt I did not belong in the institution because I come from a completely different way of being. To be honest, I have struggled with writing this thesis because I am trying to stay true to my cultural teachings throughout this process, and my identity as an *InNiNew IsKwew* has also been shaped by trying to survive in a colonial institution. Therefore, I have decided to completely embrace my roots by honouring my learning journey through writing this dissertation. I am a mother, a partner and a daughter who wishes only for the best for her family; I do this by healing myself first and foremost and by facing my fears. Being in an academic
setting is challenging because of my own experience with the educational system, which involved physical assault and verbal and spiritual abuse.

Due to my experiences with the education system, I have persevered. Interestingly, after a screening at Capilano University of my short documentary *Butterfly Monument* (2018), a film about my late cousin, child activist Shannen Koostachin, I was approached by an audience member. During the panel discussion, I stated that I wondered why I pursued a PhD, especially given the history my family has had with school in general. A young woman approached me afterwards and said, “You are continuing your education for your community”. She said that it is hard for many people, especially if they have been marginalized, but we need to continue for real change to transpire. I was caught off guard by her words, but I thanked her. I do acknowledge that I come from a long line of resiliency and strength, and I am here today because of my Ancestors and my family. Nonetheless, I often wish I spent more time learning *InNiNiMoWin* (Cree language) and being on the land, rather than spending much of my adult life navigating my way around a colonial institution. Therefore, I have decided to dedicate these words and thoughts in my dissertation to my late grandparents, and to those who are brave enough to navigate the institution.

My spirit name is *IsKwew KaTaKoNahk IsKoTeNo* - Woman Who Holds Fire - gifted to me by an *InNiNew* Medicine man Harry Snowboy many years ago. In a way, I do feel that I carry *IsKoTeo* (fire) in my heart because I use the fire to fuel my efforts. When I write, I write against the backdrop of a life of working in the arts as a storyteller, and the knowledge – *narrative* – I share through my documentary practice is deeply placed within an intricately woven *InNiNeWak* belief system informed by my late grandparents. I spent much of my childhood and young adult
life living with mother and my grandparents in Moosonee, then Ottawa and later, Toronto; they were instrumental in helping me raise my two older sons Asivak (Spider) and Mahiigan (Wolf).

Working within an InNiNeWak framework of MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Uearthing Spirit has permitted me to engage with how Indigenous story told by Indigenous documentarians has allowed us to build upon and nurture the relations with communities, our customary practices, our creativity, designs, concepts, and, of course, uphold our diversity in our approaches. In addition, during my time as an Honours student in the Documentary Media program at Ryerson University, my exploration of disseminating Ancestral knowledge, cultural practices, and ideologies offered an alternative way of understanding Indigenous documentary. My experience as a documentarian has guided the direction of my doctoral research and my studies have supported my journey in achieving my research goals and my dissertation question. My cultural teachings inform me that we must know who we are in relation to the stories we tell. When we acknowledge the root of the stories, we are paying respect to the Ancestral lands and to the Ancestors from which the stories descend presenting our lived experiences in our own voices and often we are doing so to for cultural preservation. Pamela Wilson (2016) states, “Following a long tradition of anthropological ethnographic films about indigenous cultures, the appropriation of media technology by indigenous peoples led to the emergence of indigenous self-representation on film” (p. 87). Indigenous people have moved from solely being a subject to authorship, the documentarian representing the individual and community perspectives. We have created new paradigms for the socio-political change, as well as self-representation. Since stories carry agency, they can create change in people’s lives, and so it makes sense to follow the protocol through which we access them. Also, innovative methods of Indigenous documentarians are continuing the work of producing culture-focused documentary and exploring themes of
Indigeneity. As a mid-career documentarian, I write myself into the research process because I am part of the community I am researching. I am actively participating in the process of Indigenous documentary methodologies and practices.

In each chapter of my dissertation, I will also be sharing my poetry from my book “Unearthing Secrets, Gathering Truths,” published by Keqedonce Press in the fall of 2018. I am an academic, an artist, and a documentarian. My arts practice is a significant part of who I am as an Indigenous storyteller; I explore varied forms of artistic expression. The creative writing process as seen in my poetry is informed by my childhood experience living on my Ancestral lands with my late grandparents, who influenced my life with InNiNeWak teachings. My grandparents Zabeth (KoKoom) and Abraham (MoShoom), who now exist in spirit, continue to inspire my life as an InNiNew IsKwew (Cree woman).

Adding this creative form of expression to the dissertation allows me to share more of who I am as an artist to the reader. I share the challenges of navigating my way through academia and I also provide an insight to my InNiNeWak upbringing. During the writing process, there were times when I felt disconnected to the words on the page, and so, poetry is a means for me to reconnect to myself as a storyteller. In a way the chosen poems in this dissertation serve as an epigram, but of course, they are longer in length. For example, I start with the poem InNiNeWak – The Human Beings of MoshKeKoWok, where I speak to my experience of leaving home for the first time. In 1991, I was commencing my academic journey at Concordia University in Montreal and this choice to leave home changed the trajectory of my life. The selected poetry signifies some of my lived experiences that are relevant to this study, for example I share my poem entitled Nights of Seeing in Chapter 5, about my connection to the spirit realm, which was a strong thread in the participant responses. In Chapter 7, I selected Shape Shifter,
because this poem signifies the personal transformation that occurred during the last five years of my studies. Also, I write myself into the research process because, as part of the community in which I am researching, I am actively participating in the process of documentary media knowledge production. In a way, I am gathering the study of self in relation to culture, while at the same time staying accountable for my positionality.

In starting this academic story, I introduce my first poem, which was written over 25 years ago when I first moved away from home to Montreal, Quebec to start my studies in Theatre at Concordia University. It speaks to my experience of being in an urban centre far away from my grandparents and mother. It was a challenging time for me and an important transition that continues to influence my choices today. I imagine that many Indigenous youth experience similar emotions when commencing their academic careers far away from home and community. This poem is relevant because it speaks to a significant time of change for Indigenous people. I arrived a year after the Oka crisis, and I met individuals who I still consider family, and it is through these relationships that I found my voice as an InNiNew artist.

Poem 1  InNiNeWak – The Human Beings of MoshKeKoWok

MoshKeKo village human growing quickly change approaching
short trees human generously spread connection to land
gravel pathways human floating dust bay side shacks

INNINEWAK

leaving home people lost youths bright skyline
straight lines people concrete towers invisible beings
guidance denied people cement barricades questioning truths

INNINEWAK

resilient KoKoom life MiTeWin – dream spiritual presence
1.4 MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit Framework

I achieved my research goals by applying an Indigenous knowledge framework that draws from the InNiNeWak (Cree) metaphor MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew, which translates to Unearthing Spirit in English. During the development of this framework, I examine how our positionality as Indigenous documentarians shape Indigenous documentary practices, specifically as it relates to sharing our stories in a public and community forum. Furthermore, my framework draws upon and embodies an InNiNeWak knowledge system, where the word unearth symbolizes an action and speaks to the belief that our stories are still with us, protected within our lands and the spiritual realm, as well as our collective memories. Also, in using InNiNiMoWin (Cree language) I can fully explore Indigenous documentary from an InNiNew perspective. It is important to stress that the framework of MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit reflects the action-oriented dimensions of InNiNiMoWin and thought; my research builds upon this action. My theoretical framework is shaped by InNiNeWak concepts, and transforms into an interaction of theory, which is rooted in my cultural understanding of documentary as a storytelling platform.
As part of my analysis, the framework of *MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit* also supports a critical study of a wide range of academic literature that refers to practices regarding Indigenous storytelling and decolonizing documentary. To respect my Indigenous research paradigm and Indigenous methodological choices, I will centre back to the teachings of *MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit* throughout my writing to ensure that I follow protocol; my research framework is the root of my research, and I have been taught to know and respect the roots of the stories that sustain us. Keeping my framework at the centre of my PhD studies has kept me grounded by reminding me of who I am, and where I come from. My research also includes the examination of other Indigenous documentarians, selected colleagues in the field who are contributing to the documentary industry that shares their creative, political, and cultural viewpoints.

### 1.5 Dissertation Overview

The dissertation is organized in seven (7) chapters. Chapter 2, *Literature Review* consists of a review that shapes this research and explores several themes, such as, Modes and Multi-Modal of Documentary, Shifting Stories, and the Legacy of the Transformational 60s. My literature review will provide the general context for my study, identifying gaps in the current knowledge, and identify seminal work in the field. Chapter 3, the *Theoretical Frameworks* explores *MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit*, with a respectful acknowledgment of its roots, and I investigate two supporting, linked frameworks: Indigenous Storytelling and Decolonizing Documentary. I will also discuss how my framework contributes to the existing scholarship. Chapter 4, *Methodology and Analysis* is divided into two sections. The first section *Methodology* introduces my participants and their contributions to Indigenous documentary. The second section *Analysis* provides an overview of two analysis methods, the *Outward* and *Inward*
processes involved in the data collection over the course of my studies. The chapter also
discusses how Indigenous methodologies and documentary methods intersect, contextualizing
my participants approach to documentary, which assisted with my analysis, and how this
intersection relates to my framework of MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit. Chapter
5, Outward Findings presents the outward findings from participant responses to the interview
phase of the research, including secondary literature weaved with commentary on the five (5)
emerging themes from the interviews. Chapter 6, Inward Findings summarizes the inward
findings from my self-analysis and summarizes my pedagogical and ethical underpinnings.
Summary conclusions of the research are provided in Chapter 7, Conclusion and followed by
discussion of the limitations of this study, and suggestions as to possible areas of further research
that will build upon the work presented.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

I begin this chapter with the poem, *Battle* (Koostachin, 2018), from my book of poetry, “Unearthing Secrets, Gathering Truths” to describe my experience of struggling with the English language and passing as white. I was raised by *InNiNeWak* grandparents in Moosonee, and they only spoke *InNiNiMoWin*. This poem also speaks to both the hardship and challenges my community faces and our culture’s resiliency and connection to the land. *Battle* reflects how we as Indigenous people survive colonialism and continue to strive to live our lives according to our Ancestral knowledge.

Poem 2  BATTLE

struggling with English words
how do you identify me?
you have no idea who I am
you cannot see beyond the flesh
only what you project onto me
your disappointment stings
creates a battle inside me

ATTACK

today seems to be the time of the enemy
life is swinging to one end of the pendulum
healing is delayed
once again, we are waiting
not sure for what
drowned by the empty words of idiots
I question myself
what do I have to say?
does it matter?

PURPOSE

hard times ahead
hate revealing its ugly face
ignorance
stupidity in disguise
shutting me down
they are blind to the world in which we live
where we embrace our realities
we live in a place distant from the future

**FAILURE**
communities are filled with doubt
unsure of what to expect
today is timeless
countless actions of resistance
we continue to fight the monsters of humanity

**RESULTS**
minds and spirits on the battlefield
defeating only our selves
emotions held captive
safety from them
safety from us
the divide
bleeding into each other slowly

**ENERGY**
gods in the earth
gods in the sky
gods in the wind
gods in the stars
unattainable
proceed carefully
walk amongst each other with caution

**SURVIVE**
there are ones that judge
they are blinded by ego
trapped in hopelessness
forever reaching for what they will never have
they plead for freedom
from the shackles of expectations

**TRUST**
believe in the goodness of life
This chapter consists of the literature review providing the general context for my study finding gaps in the current knowledge and identifying seminal work in the field. I also touch upon documentary theory, introducing Bill Nichols, an American theoretician known for his work as the founder of the study of documentary. I will explore the five documentary modes (the expository, observational, participatory, reflexive, and performative modes), their conventions, and the contributions of each mode to creating and interpreting a story. For each, I also draw on examples from Indigenous documentarians, whose project may fit into several modes of documentary. This section also explores three aspect of documentary practice: *Modes and Multimodal Documentary, Shifting Stories*, and *Legacy of the Transformation 60s*. The literature review explores existing scholarship in relation to Indigenous documentary and I will provide examples of works that have shifted perspective and confront settler colonialism. Conversations regarding relationship to story have been at the forefront of Indigenous documentary and methodology for the last several years, especially since the Indigenous community has been speaking out publicly against misrepresentation in mainstream media. Though this may appear to be a recent development, I believe that the trailblazers before us were speaking out since the invention of the first camera, whether heard or not. With the recent creation of the Indigenous
Screen Office (ISO) to develop Indigenous stories on screen and increase representation and the general boost for financing for Indigenous film, there has been a significant shift in the industry. The learning and reflexive self-analysis that has occurred over the course of the last five years as a PhD student with the Institute of Gender, Race, Sexuality and Social Justice has been instrumental for me, and I have shared my ideas and research model with colleagues in academia and with the industry.

2.1 Indigenous Documentary

Indigenous documentarians shed light on issues that are significant in our day to day lives and our documentary practices, and recognize the obligation to follow protocol when working with Indigenous story. This dissertation is informed by research and theory as it relates to Indigenous documentary practices, and the following literature review is organized by the following themes: Modes and Multi-Modal of Documentary, Shifting Stories, and lastly, the Legacy of the Transformational 60s.

Although Indigenous documentary has followed a long tradition of anthropological ethnographic films\(^1\) about Indigeneity (Wilson 2016 p. 87), we are forging our own path as storytellers not only to dispel colonial myths, but to honour Indigenous narratives. In colonial documentary and narrative stories of Indigeneity, the consequences of detrimental misrepresentation served the public’s settler imagination. Jennifer David (2012) states, “The “Native as Other” perspective in film is almost as old as the movies themselves” (p. 8). And so, there was a deep desire to control knowledge production, and link Indigenous communities to each other using the documentary platform. The 60s represented a break from earlier modes of

\(^1\) Indigenous documentarians have proceeded with other ways that honour Indigenous knowledge systems, and in conversation with ethnographic tradition. Indigenous documentarians have forged new pathways of storytelling methodologies, which include the Indigenous subject as the authority.
colonial ethnographic documentary and prompted a more self-conscious approach to documentary. During this time, Indigenous documentarians embarked on an exploration of documentary forms and knowledge production. The use of documentary not only sustained and built stronger communities, but it also worked to articulate our their/his/herstories, and community concerns. Early documentarians such as Columbia, Obomsawin, and Dunn recognized that mainstream’s representation of *Indigenous as other* were problematic and unfortunately repeatedly reinforced. They also saw documentary as a means of furthering socio-political transformation by inserting Indigenous stories into national narratives (Ginsburg 2002 p. 302). Biased representations of the *vanishing other*, or the white construct of a romanticized past are disseminated around the globe. Daniel Francis (2012) states, “When two cultures meet, especially cultures as different as those of Western Europe and indigenous North America, they inevitably interpret each other in terms of stereotype” (p. 221). Indigenous peoples have found themselves as objects of settler’s image-making practice in detrimental ways, and the impact of the single narrative (incomplete story), or the imposition of stereotypes has steered toward advantageous opportunity for white settlers. Robin DiAngelo (2018), author of “White Fragility” speaks to white privilege, a sociological concept referring to advantages that are taken for granted, and how “our understanding of ourselves is necessarily based on our comparison with others” (p. 28). Settlers do not experience these practices the same ways we Indigenous people do, and so, the question of representation looks different to us. Settler society are presented with information of racialized groups through mass media, which not only shapes current colonial structures, but also conditions perceptions. Also, white supremacy is disseminated though media representations, influencing society as a whole, and Indigenous peoples have been dealing with harmful misrepresentation ever since the conception of documentary where we found ourselves
as subject or othered. Stories influence the perceptions of the visible, locating them in narratives of artifice and authenticity (Hearne 2006 p. 308). Although settlers have been at the forefront of appropriating, objectifying and commodifying Indigenous culture, we are actively recovering knowledge systems as their own cultural property. Indigenous documentary has helped to oppose narrative theft and has created spaces for the creation of a vital representation of Indigeneity.

Settlers who arrived on our lands were not free from cultural conditioning, which encompasses an understanding of the world: they came here with patterns of domination. “While Indigenous peoples have been the subjects of ‘objectivity’, it has been White settlers who have been in the position of power to wield it with impunity” (Sium and Ritskes 2013 p. 5). Documentary that works to decolonize calls attention to our long their/his/herstory of resistance, and the subjectivity of Indigenous story demonstrates that we are still here, we exist. Our stories speak against colonial violence and our role is central to renewal and mobilization. Stereotypes inform different collective and individual responses, and we understand racism as complex, but by sharing our stories, we challenge racialized messaging regarding Indigeneity.

Moreover, Indigenous documentarians are revitalizing community ethics and the transmission of protocol through story. Our ethical principles and practices guide and protect our cultural property. Sium and Ritskes (2013) state, “By telling our stories we’re at the same time disrupting dominant notions of intellectual rigor and legitimacy, while also redefining scholarship as a process that begins with the self” (p. IV). We are actively repatriating and examining cinematic meaning, therefore, offering alternative understandings of Indigeneity and providing Indigenous-led processes and mechanisms of documentary. Stories become a means to resist settler colonialism and ensure we pass on epistemologies, ethos, and values, which resists domination.
2.2 Modes and Multi-Modal of Documentary

Documentary is a form of cinema that tells us about actual life events and situations involving real people, and the documentarian is responsible for shaping the story. Bill Nichols has offered influential documentary genealogy (Bruzzi 2002 p. 3), his documentary theory, although hybrid, is compartmental. “Documentaries structure their films to interpret and organize facts in particular ways and make particular connections” (Hayward & Jiang, 2016, p. 390). There has been a shift in our understanding of documentary, and recently, documentary has come to suggest uncertainty and subjective construction (Nichols, 1994, p. 1). Documentary has evolved, moving away from the notion of trying to control unpredictable elements, and is more likely to be structured around subjectivity. The journey of the documentarian is one of enquiry, dictated by events unfolding in front of the camera.

Although Nichols identifies six approaches to documentary, I will explore the five main types of documentary modes identified in Nichols genealogical paradigm. The sixth approach the Poetic Mode is a new category that places emphasis on tonal and rhythmic qualities and descriptive passages (Bruzzi 2002 p. 4). This mode is followed by the five more familiar modes that I will explore in this chapter: the expository, observational, participatory, reflexive, and performative approaches, as well as their conventions and the contributions of each mode to creating and interpreting a story.

In respect to documentary theory, there exists variant forms within each approach, a submode, Nichols attempts to classify the differences through the appropriation of a distinctive documentary storytelling device, such as didactic (voice over), use of emotive footage, or the observational mode in regards to the filmic style. These six modes establish a loose framework of affiliation within which individuals may work; they set up conventions that a given film may
adopt; and they provide specific expectations viewers anticipate having fulfilled" (Nichols 2017 p. 99). Although, his theory is considered significant and influential, documentarians of today, have become to undermine his efforts. Documentary has evolved with the times, contemporary, and stylistically innovative in diverse ways, and this is evident in the work of Indigenous documentarians.

In this section, I have attempted to offer examples of work that may fall into one or even two or more categories, to provide insight and subjectivity that documentary modes will one day be classified as either representation and reality. This section is by no means an exhaustive exploration of Nichols’ modes of documentary. I offer examples of Indigenous documentarians who lend their work to the categories of approaches, which often times intersect. Each different type of documentary establishes a loose framework, that for the most part, interact and overlap (Nichols 2017 p. 99). For each, I draw on Indigenous storytelling examples from Indigenous documentarians.

2.2.1 Expository Approach

In the *Expository Approach*, a message is communicated through the documentary and employs voiceover or titles. According to Bruzzi (2002), “the expository documentary is attributed to the 1930s,” offering poetics, visual associations and descriptive passages (p. 3).

Nichols tell us, “The expository and poetic modes often harvest, glean, or compile images from the world with relative indifference to the specific individuals or situations captured in order to shape proposals or perspectives on a general topic” (2017 p. 156). Expository documentaries convey ideas or information in a new and ground-breaking way, focusing on issues relevant to the documentarian, as in the case with Obomsawin’s documentary practice, which falls under other categories. Her voice acts as socio-political actor, taking a clear subjective role and stance.
She combines this approach with some emotional elements, for example, *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*, in which she tells the story from within the barricades during the Oka crisis in 1990. She utilizes expressive techniques such as music, drawings, and poetics to strengthen the impact of her documentary. Obomsawin selects and arranges a pattern of storytelling that sheds light on Indigeneity. Another example is Dana Claxton, who challenges stereotypes with her image making and video installations, such as *Landscape #1* (2005), which uses sounds and moving images. She offers the possibility of alternative forms of knowledge where viewers are invited to experience the world in a particular way. Claxton’s documentary can also be categorized under several documentary approaches, including the poetic mode because of the exposition in her practice. Not unlike other documentarians, her documentary work can be attributed to creating subdivisions within Nichols’ categorization. Claxton connects two landscapes, the prairies and the cultures that live there. She infuses the living philosophy that she is part of the landscape. In essence, the overall goal of this approach tends to be prescriptive, meaning it can be used as a tool of communication.

There is a tendency to use documentary as a tool of resistance and authority over the viewer who engages with the story. Limitations may include that this documentary approach could be understood as speaking directly to the viewer in the form of authoritative commentary. This mode does offer a strong argument, which works to the advantage of an Indigenous documentarian who is focused on significant issues that pertain to Indigenous livelihood. Expository documentaries arose at the beginning of documentary as a storytelling platform and are still prominent today. Every documentary carries a cinematic voice, the signature of the documentarian, which attests to their individuality, and perhaps even the collective. These unique voices lend themselves to field of documentary theory.
2.2.2 Observational Approach

In contrast to the expository approach to documentary, the *Observational Approach*, which began in the 1960s and understood as visual anthropology (Grimshaw & Ravetz 2009 p. 538) works to understand knowledge as it is created. The audience watches, listens, and observes – which aims to humanize the documentary practice. Bruzzi (2002) stresses that the “aesthetics of observational/verité cinema have become the *sine qua non* of faux documentaries, the way to signal, therefore, the fakery of the documentary” (p. 9). Documentarians have accepted documentary’s ability to provide a reflexive understanding of reality, proposing a complicated documentary truth. Documentary truth can be understood as the negotiation between documentarian and subject – documentaries are acts that become truth when the camera begins to record. Another example of an observational documentary is Alethea Arnaquq-Baril’s *Angry Inuk* (2016); it articulates Inuit epistemologies, whether it be spiritual or socioeconomical, challenging mainstream discourse on seal hunting. The documentarian travels the Canadian artic providing a platform for hunters and families who rely on seal meat for survival to share their stories. Her documentary offers an insider perspective of Inuit cultural ways of being and survivance. “The film emphasizes the importance of family, tradition, and simply provides a lens into the Inuit way of life: so similar to other Canadians, yet distinct in certain ways” (“Angry Inuk: Documentary Review” 2018). *Angry Inuk* contradicts the single narrative about seal hunting with the clever use of footage depicting people surviving the environment they live in. Focusing on the Inuit experience conveys the potential of reclamation that offers an alternative to the mainstream appropriates the power of significance. The documentary weaves the reality of Inuit life with the challenges of dealing with the anti-sealing industry. *Angry Inuk* provides the viewer the feeling of being the accomplice in the journey of Indigenous livelihood.
Overall, this approach challenges documentary conventions because it increases transparency by capturing our daily lives as subjects. The documentarian surrenders control, wherein the subject interactions and intentions are unaffected by the director; for instance, Gregory Coyes *Slow Media* focuses on real time media and promotes decolonized media and offers an Indigenous sense of cinematic time and space. This approach removes the didactic voiceover and in turn overrides the hierarchies that exist in the expository approach to story. Stephen Mamber (1974) employs that observational, otherwise understood as cinéma-vérité “can be described as a method of filming employing hand-held camera and live, synchronous sound” (p. 79). Observational documentary means recording real people, nature, or events in undirected circumstances, yet the documentarian determines the themes they want to explore in the story. For the most part, observational documentary allows the viewer to engage with the story from a hidden or even a safe distance as the events unfold on the screen. Obomsawin celebrates polyphony and works to question the act of representation. Scholar Jennifer Gauthier (2013) states:

Alanis Obomsawin has a distinct style of documentary filmmaking; she follows in Grierson (NFB) footsteps by using the didactic tone. Obomsawin’s work is rooted in the traditions of Canadian national cinema, but she builds upon Grierson’s expository style with her keen powers of observation and an impulse to situate herself within the text. The observational mode, as described by Nichols, chronicles the actions of social actors while the filmmaker recedes into the background. (p. 92)

In the documentary world, there are common misunderstandings that observational documentary is one and the same with objectivity. The personal point of view is unavoidable and most documentary films reveal the constructed, and the intervention of the documentarian in the
storytelling signals the death of unbiased filmmaking. Young (1995) rejects the idea that the camera is invisible, stressing that subject/s would modify behaviour when being recorded, he states:

[T]he ideal was never to pretend that the camera was not there – the ideal was to try to photograph and record ‘normal’ behaviour. Clearly what finally has to be understood by this idea is that normal behaviour being filmed is the behaviour that is normal for the subjects under the circumstances, including, but not exclusively, the fact they are being filmed. (p. 101).

The exploration of any given situation forges intimate relationships between documentarian and subjects. In making an observational documentary, they can focus more on the image and capturing a candid representation without directly articulating personal opinions. Observational documentary invites discovery and presents interpretive possibilities as in the case with Tasha Hubbard’s documentary *Birth of a Family* (2017). The audience was respectfully invited to engage, observing intimate moments captured between reunited siblings who were systematically severed. Hubbard presents footage of life as it unfolds and that tends to show, not tell. Such an approach allows viewers to construct their own perspective regarding the subject matter.

Therefore, there seems to be no limits to the possibilities of this approach, but on the other hand, limitations of this approach have left scholars questioning whether observational documentary deprives viewers of the broader context of the story. I would also argue that if a documentarian is ill-prepared, and they are documenting a personal story of trauma, there is the potential to put the subject/s at risk through the sharing of traumatic experiences/events. I am often working with stories of trauma, and so, I understand that protocol needs to be followed.
Particularly, in these sensitive cases, as to not further exploit persons sharing their story with an audience. “It came to be seen as a form of scientism in which detached camera served to objectify and dehumanize the human subjects of its gaze” (Grimshaw & Ravetz 2009 p. 538).

When this approach is utilized, and protocols are followed, then it can be a valuable approach obtaining knowledge that is relevant to an Indigenous audience – replacing the colonial lens with an Indigenous one.

2.2.3 Participatory Approach

The Participatory Approach or otherwise known as Interactive Mode, engages and participates, and is characterized by dialogue between the director and the subjects in dialogue. Nichols (1998) asserts that the observational mode offers “the impression that the filmmaker is not intruding on the behavior of others raises question of unacknowledged or indirect intrusion,” (p. 111). It emerged as a critique of the didactic form of the expository mode. Although the modes of documentary overlap, one mode will, for the most part, be more dominant.

Participatory documentary shows knowledge learned from interactions, for example in the form of interviews, which allows for a certain neutrality of messaging (McDonald 2007 p. 212). The influence of the documentarian is acknowledged throughout the story, and the interactions between the storyteller and subject/s is known to the viewer. For example, the late Gil Cardinal, the acclaimed director of Foster Child (1987), a harrowing tale, sets off on a journey to locate his biological mother. The documentary works to address settler colonialism in a very personal and courageous manner, where Cardinal has partial control, but is still able to influence the story through the questions being asked.
*Foster Child* is one of the great docs to come out of Canada, and nobody but Gil could have made it. Gil made it possible for us to think about putting our own stories on the screen, and that was something new and important. (Jesse Wente, Director of ISO, 2019). He explores a wide range of significant themes such as reconciliation, child protection laws and settler colonialism, and invites viewers on his investigation into self-discovery. Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences alike were impacted in a meaningful and profound way (Globe and Mail “Gil Cardinal” p. 2015).

Another example is Colonization Road (2016), directed by Michelle St. John. The story follows Ryan McMahon, an Anishnaabe comedian and activist, as he learns about Ontario’s colonization roads and their impact on Indigenous and settlers alike. The documentary uses archival footage, interviews, and interactions with McMahon and the public. The documentary has led to systemic change and prompted to changing the names of roads.

Canada is coming to this reckoning right now as people of all backgrounds try to process our country's not-so-polite history. McMahon is saying that the key is acknowledging that the past still informs the present, that the policies of Canada's founders are still being felt by First Nations, that colonization is still the law of the land. (Huffington Post “Colonization” 2016).

And so, in Nichol’s scholarship regarding documentary and more specifically on the different modes of documentary, it is evident that Indigenous documentary creates a pathway for significant critique of dominant ideologies and the politics of what is centered and what is marginalized in mainstream.

Limitations of the participatory mode include loss of independent judgment on behalf of the documentarian. It has a lengthier process with an uncertain outcome. A major concern is the
pressure to manipulate; for example, they can select subjects who agree or side with their own point of view. But as Obomsawin often states, there is no such thing as an objective filmmaker. Lewis (2006) stresses that “documentary is not real, but that is real enough to matter” (p. 154). Indigenous documentary ruptures settler colonial ideology, offering meaningful, impactful, and subversive perspectives. The observational documentarian purports objectivity because they observe and record without much interference. However, many Indigenous documentarians embrace subjectivity, as their works speak to the importance of self-representation through voice and have come to question claims of objectivity, since “for the native, objectivity is always directed against him” (Fanon 1963 p. 77). The question of truth comes to play, as we are now at a place where we are critiquing this notion of objectivity in relation to outsiders coming into our communities and sharing our stories.

2.2.4 Reflexive Approach

Similar to participatory, the Reflexive Approach includes the documentarian within the documentary; however, the story does not explore an outside subject. Reflexive defines knowledge as contextual, framed in personal assumptions (Nichols 1998 p. 60). Reflexive documentary focuses on the documentarian, and also on the act of making the documentary. It reveals details of the filmic process to the viewers and shows how being filmed potentially interferes with the construction of reality. An example of this approach is the work of emerging Ojibwe filmmaker Kelly Roulette’s short documentary My Mother, My Rock (2020), in which she recounts her heartfelt and painful experience of losing her mother. The documentary weaves

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2 In the article Standing with and Speaking as Faith scholar Kim TallBear speaks to how objectivity is based on the lived experience and knowledge priorities of the subjects. This understanding of objectivity helps to working in non-standard ways. TallBear also discusses Indigenous concepts of objectivity in action and the importance of challenging standard notions of objectivity that conflate it with neutrality.
together a self-reflexive interview with footage of her search for the appropriate rock (tombstone) to honour her mother. Roulette shares her promise to her dying mother, while reflecting on the day she lost her mother. She invites us to engage with her personal story of loss, asking the viewer to see the documentary for what it is, a representation. This mode is the most self-conscious and self-questioning mode of representation, where the documentarian provokes the viewer to a heightened mindfulness of what the story represents (Ginsburg 2002 p. 302).

Although *My Mother, My Rock* is short in length it succeeds in provoking an emotional response from viewers. Roulette shares intimate moments of what she reveals is one of the most painful but gratifying days of her life.

The intersection of Indigeneity and *traditional* forms of documentary poses challenges to mainstream representation. Raheja (2013) asserts:

Think critically about how the images presented on-screen by Indigenous filmmakers and actors in narrative films not only pose key challenges to dominant discourses on film theory and history but also supplement crucial debates on sovereignty, identity, and Indigenous knowledge production. (p. 6)

Claiming space, and incorporating cultural protocols in practice, honours the knowledge and the stories; documentary is a form of sustaining Indigenous life, and a reclamation of voice, vital in decolonization. Our stories are a creative force, rooted in relationality where the documentarian feels a sense of responsibility to the viewer. Central to decolonizing documentary is to reclaim and resist the idea that our communities are not facts to be known, and with sharing story comes responsibility shaped by complex systems of Indigenous ways of being.

Stories are open-ended, and an act of addressing the complexity of Indigenous identities and contextualizing our differences. Stories can be form of rebellion, meaning they break away
from colonial notions of Indigeneity. Searching for Winnetou (2018), which one could argue falls under several categories such as performative and participatory, is a story that follows Ojibway author Drew Hayden Taylor who travels to Germany. He, an Indigenous man, investigates Indianthuisiast – Germans who are obsessed with Indigenous culture. The story of Winnetou goes back to Karl May, a 19th-century author who created a fictional character. While travelling, Taylor is confronted by the legacy of these real and imaginary people. Throughout Searching for Winnetou, Taylor reflects on his seemingly uncomfortable conversations with Indianthuisiasts while exploring the controversy surrounding cultural appropriation. In this case the German holds the narrative power of Winnetou, and Taylor’s presence in the story speaks to and contests the idealistic views of Indigeneity. The documentary is a reflexive inquiry and didactic in form, which relies heavily on the voice of Taylor to narrate the story. The documentary hosted informal interviews, narration, footage of gatherings in Germany, and Germans appropriating Indigenous culture. The reflexive approach allowed for Taylor to relate to German subjects and to critique the subject matter from an Indigenous perspective. Although there were funny moments in the documentary, the severity of cultural appropriation came to light through the documentarian’s subjectivity.

Limitations of the reflexive approach include the construction of truth where documentarians build themselves around relationships with subject/s. Another critique of this approach is centered on the transparency and performative quality, which emphasizes authorship. According to Bruzzi (2002), “The question of authorship has traditionally proved a thorny problem for the documentary, as the recognised intervention of an auteur disrupts the non-fiction film’s supposed allegiance to transparency and truthfulness” (p. 197). Reflexive documentaries call attention to the formal conventions of the documentary film itself (Nichols 2010 p. 155). The
reflexive mode can overlap with other approaches such as participatory and observational modes, just as other modes can merge.

2.2.5 Performative Approach

A Performative Approach to documentary focuses on the documentarian’s involvement with the subject/s, attempting to show a larger historical or socio-political world through their own lens. As in the case with my feature documentary *Remembering Inninimowin* (2010), which explores several issues, such as language revitalization, the housing crisis, inequitable access to education and the water crisis in Attawapiskat. This approach provides an alternative to empirical, factual, or abstract forms of knowledge and relies on the expository approach (Nichols 2010 p. 109). In a way, the documentarian becomes a guide for the story and for the viewers. It emphasizes emotion, at times using voiceover, music, sound, and snippets of interview to move with the viewer. The difference between this approach and others is that this one embraces the personal and emotions, and this way of engaging with story can be suitable for expressing emotive experiences felt by our respective communities. Scholars argue that including a performative element undermines the message of the documentary. According to Bruzzi (2002), “Documentary now widely acknowledges and formally engages with its own constructedness, its own performative agenda; it is not that reality has changed, but rather the ways in which documentary – mainstream as well as independent – has chosen to represent it” (p. 252). This mode of documentary can provide insight to the inequality experienced by Indigenous community and deconstruct ways of coming to know.

Well intended documentary, produced with respect and commitment, can be very effective. Such is the case with Metis filmmaker, Marie Clements’ musical documentary, *The Road Forward* (2017). Her documentary weaves music and story together into documentary
form from an Indigenous perspective. For the most part, Canadian history has excluded the voices of Indigenous peoples, so Clement provides viewers a more inclusive account of how Indigenous people have contributed to the arts. Clement reveals storytelling as knowledge production, informing viewers of key moments in the their/his/herstories of Indigenous rights. The musical pushes boundaries and offers a blend of documentary approaches.

Some concerns arising from this approach includes the possibility of misrepresentation or eccentricity, but can also encourage viewers to challenge negative connotations. Limitations of the performative approach is that the documentarian could potentially be more focused on the act of performance rather than the revelations in the story, where they could be blamed for any contradictions that arise in the story, where the viewer is left to accept the documentary’s inability to offer a truthful understanding of the reality they are portraying. Moreover, performative documentary modes can be understood as the slippage between what is real and what is representation, which could perhaps subjugate subject/s. According to Hearne (2006), “Through strategic attention to production situations, oral storytelling performance and the historical investment in ‘the power of actuality,’ the filmmakers attempt to imaginatively recover the cultural values encoded in the narratives” (p. 309). Indigenous documentarians are the rightful inheritors to sovereignty rights based on cultural knowledge systems. Repatriation and the reclamation of Indigenous story results in living our diverse cultural memories where documentarians are the authors of their own community stories.

In summary, Indigenous documentary rarely provides absolute examples of any of the approaches discussed in this chapter. More so, based on the examples provided, I conclude that the observational mode is evidently less suited because Indigenous documentarian rarely indulge in the pretense of objectivity. Kovach (2010) suggests that knowledge then becomes that which
can be proven true and “from a traditional Cree perspective, truth is bound in a sacred commitment” (p. 102). While working with the documentary storytelling platform, the documentarian must consider cultural bias and personal factors such as age, gender, social location and relationships, fully understanding that story is the story according to how they understand it to be. Of course, the purpose of the story is to explore ontology, without distracting from the message the documentarian wishes to convey, but story reflects the authentic experience of a subject and/or a community making connections with ontology and epistemology. Bruzzi (2002) argues that “documentary are predicated upon a negotiation between the polarities of objectivity and subjectivity” (p. 46). Indeed, the personal stories explored in Indigenous documentary offer a deeper understanding of Indigeneity with stories embedded in lived experiences. Documentary creates self-awareness and a deeper understanding of our positionality in relation to story.

The use of technology is to achieve artistic expression and explore visions and goals. Wilson (2016) states, “The urge to document—as in to provide a record of, to provide evidence for, to furnish proof of—has been and continues to be one of the most compelling motivations behind indigenous uses of film, video, and digital technology” (p. 90). With the growing audience of Indigenous documentary, the demands are reshaping the forms and messages, and the use of varied techniques and technologies to serve the collective need valuing Indigenous authorship. In addition, the very core of Indigenous documentary challenges colonial paradigms (mainstream approaches to storytelling), especially the linear form. Indigenous documentary practices can be non-linear, innovating alternative decolonized forms that surpass traditional western aesthetics, style, and even subject matter. Documentaries are broad, can be ground-breaking and expansive with collaborative and interactive formats. The camera can be utilized as
an observational tool to observe day to day life, but I understand that we can never really be observational in practice. Since documentarians observe and make significant choices, they are faced with ethical choices, especially where Indigenous story is concerned.

Recently, documentary has been increasingly recognized for its variety of forms and approaches, such as stop motion, installation, slow media, and animation: multi-modal documentary. We are moving away from the early western style of documentary seeped in an ethnographic model, where we are exposing socio-political issues from an Indigenous perspective. Indigenous documentary is visual sovereignty, self-representation and the reclamation of story that offers contemporary documentary practices for cultural production. The medium has also experienced a vital change in the way the documentarian approaches not only rural and urban Indigenous communities, but also how we approach the story itself. Indigenous documentarians have produced new platforms for first-hand accounts and established imaginative forms of documentary. Formats range from installation (e.g., Dana Claxton’s Buffalo Bone China (1997) and my 2012 media installation Alive with Breath), to virtual reality (e.g., Lisa Jackson’s Biidaaban (2018), and multiplatform projects (e.g., Skawennati’s Time Traveller™), and stop motion, (e.g., Amanda Strong’s Four Faces of the Moon (2016)). They consider these diverse forms of expression documentary because they represent our respective truths. There are other digital/filmic forms – all uniquely conveying our own truths.

2.2 Shifting Stories

As scholarship flourishes, studies have proven that regardless of the form, documentary by Indigenous documentarians play a key role in offering new forms of storytelling practices (Columpar 2010; Bredin 2010; Alia, 2010). In all its forms, Indigenous documentary braids together the principles, strategies, and values of Indigenous storytelling into their practice.
Scholars Marubbio and Buffalohead (2013) acknowledge the need to counter the collective impact of colonialism through a variety of disciplines (p. 2). Their research also explores the necessary means to comprehend the complexities of storytelling as well as the deficiency of analytical reviews investigating the cultural establishment of stories by Indigenous documentarians in North America. Indigenous documentary is a form of resistance and through documentary we act against the distortion of our identity as Indigenous peoples. “Indigenous communities and filmmakers globally respond through film against representations of them as exotic and vanishing peoples, as innocent or dangerous, or as colonized by more advanced settler cultures” (Marubbio & Buffalohead 2013 p. 7). Also, there is revitalization and a resurgence associated with Indigenous documentarians, and there is a significant shift in how we approach available platforms of documentary. For example, a central figure in film, Loretta Todd’s media work ranges from experimental, installation, documentary, narrative to television, and her sphere of influence reaches beyond her films. Her work has inspired others, such as Dana Claxton, Thirza Cuthand, and others. Through her work she explores difficult and pertinent issues Indigenous people face; her films act to start conversation.

By using documentary as a means for cultural and socio-political expression, we are taking control over the image making process, moving away from being the described object to controlling the images of Indigenous culture. There certainly remains the longstanding, vigorous, and grueling relationship with contemporary mass media; old colonial stereotypes persist no matter how many counter-images are presented. Indigenous narratives continue to be a means to reclaim, inspire, inform, educate, uphold cultural safety and social justice within our communities. For media scholars Wilson and Stewart (2008), Indigenous documentary is necessary for achieving equity by advocating and mediating between governments, scholars, and
communities, thus increasing comprehensive awareness of our diverse cultural knowledge systems (p. 25). Indigenous documentary works to fight systemic racism and discrimination, sustain Indigenous ways of being, and advocate for our rights, which includes our languages, knowledge systems, resources, and, of course, our stories. Racism is systemic, and Indigenous people are directly impacted by white supremacy wherein we are faced with repetitive media representations of Indigenous as other and whiteness as the ideal. Indigenous documentarians confront racist frameworks such as cultural erasure, misrepresentation, romanticization, and perverted histories, which are deeply embedded in mainstream media. Sociologist Joe Feagin coined the term “white racial frame”, which speaks to how white settlers reinforce racial message of white superiority, Robin DiAngelo (2018) states:

In this way, the white racial frame rests on, and is a key mechanism of, white supremacy. The frame is deep and extensive with thousands of stored “bits”. These bits are pieces of cultural information – images, stories, interpretations, omissions, silences- that are passed along from one person and group to the next, and from one generation to the next. The bits circulate both explicitly and implicitly, for examples through movies, television, news and other media and stories told to us by family and friends. (p. 250)

Documentary promotes visibility and is critical in the preservation of cultural identity and in sustaining community. We replace negative and racialized depictions of Indigeneity by calling out and drawing attention to the daily aspects of our day-to-day life and we consciously and strategically contribute stories of resiliency, strength, and vitality. By authoring our stories, we explore Indigeneity through a specific and truthful lens. Through documentary we can occupy space and demand systemic change, as in the case of Richard Cardinal: Cry from a Diary of

The relationship between storyteller and Indigenous knowledge systems is rooted in the appreciation to protect and to uphold story. Kovach (2010) states, “Story as methodology is decolonizing research. Stories of resistance inspire generations about the strength of the culture. Yet, there are political implications of Indigenous research that need to be figured into the equation” (p. 103). Therefore, documentary techniques/approaches by Indigenous documentarians sustain the notion of interconnectedness, languages, and customary practices in the age of globalization as technology has allowed for greater mobilization, reaffirming the rights and recognition of Indigenous peoples. The use of documentary to share Indigenous story means that the documentarian is the guardian of the story, and the stories we care for are reminders of who we are in this ever-changing world.

### 2.3 Legacy of the Transformational 60s

The 1960s were transformational in Canadian film. Indigenous documentarians found themselves working in the film industry, both in front of the camera and as writer, producer, and directors. The National Film Board of Canada (NFB) commenced training programs, equipping Indigenous peoples with colonial tools to tell their own stories, and without much interference (Foster & Evans, 2014). Our story warriors cleared the path for the next generation of documentarians. Indigenous political movements were on the rise; political activism coincided with the new understanding that research methods, technology, and various modes of artistic expression could be utilized, not only as a tool of reclamation, but mobility. As feminist scholar Darlene Clover (2014) claims, “Critical to community-based research is knowledge dissemination, or what is sometimes called mobilization” (p. 144). Indigenous communities were
using technology to assert their right to self-determination and cultural survivance. The increasing access to technology reflects an important shift and despite our challenges, we worked to offer stories of resilience that advance Indigenous rights and cultural production. Fortunately, since the transformational 60s, opportunities for Indigenous documentarians have developed, beyond the NFB where Indigenous documentary has continued to evolve. Scholar Karrmen Crey (2016) states:

Indigenous media practitioners have availed themselves of opportunities that have developed to produce media-based projects in affiliation with cultural institutions across the country. Even while focusing more narrowly on nonfiction media, Indigenous artists and producers have worked in range of formats over the past two decades, including film, television, and video, and take up diverse issues relevant to Indigenous peoples (p. 18).

Crey suggests that production prospects have continued to shift due to key developments in the media landscape. Evidently, Indigenous documentary has been centering Indigeneity for decades, and redefining documentary culture by asserting an Indigenous voice as authority. We have pierced through the limitations of the didactic form, replacing the ethnographic documentary methodology with an invigorating fusion of blurred genres; subsequently we have introduced an inventive and flexible approach to documentary. Pamela Wilson (2006) states:

Documentary film and video have been at the heart of indigenous media production for nearly a half-century. Following a long tradition of anthropological ethnographic films about indigenous cultures, the appropriation of media technology by indigenous peoples led to the emergence of indigenous self-representation on film. (p. 87)
Documentaries by prominent Indigenous documentarians such as Alethea Annaquq-Baril of *Angry Inuk* (2016), Alexandra Lazarowich of *Fast Horses* (2018), Sterlin Harjo of *This May Be the Last Time* (2014) and others have produced stories that are relevant to our communities, and also created an intimate link to our universality and to our diverse identities. For media scholar Steven Leuthold (1998), new documentary approaches “have been created in an era of active discussion about the relationship between Indian art and identity” (p. 132). Leuthold recognizes documentary as a significant tool for preserving knowledge, and in communicating Indigenous identity on an international scale; therefore, documentaries by Indigenous people around the world have cultivated a space for cultural sovereignty. “Both cinema of sovereignty and visual sovereignty are aspects of media sovereignty: the act of controlling the camera and refocusing the lens to promote Indigenous agency in the media process and in their own image construction” (Marrubbio & Buffalohead. 2006 p. 10). It is time to reconceptualize Indigenous sovereignty as a strategy to sustain culture, to a model that analyzes culture as a living context and foundation for the exercise of group autonomy and the survival of Indian Nations (Coffey & Tsosie 2001 p. 191). Indigenous cultural sovereignty means the reclamation of our stories and the thoughtful and collective process of dissemination, which includes repatriation and building community.

Indigenous people connect with documentary as a form of expression; documentary necessary as a storytelling and visual expression tool. Documentary soon became a means to embrace generations of viewers, highlighting the importance of self-representation, while moving beyond the archetypical story of the exotic *other*. This was a truly transformational time when documentary became available to Indigenous peoples and it also became a vehicle for Indigenous women to speak out against injustice and inequalities. Women emerged from the
margins of western society in full force, and quickly became recognized as activists and advocates for Indigenous rights (Dowell 2013; Gauthier, 2013; Pick 1999; Marubbio & Buffalohead, 2006; Taunton, 2013; Kalafatic, 1999). Not only are documentarians adhering to and applying Indigenous ways of knowing and protocol to the practice of documentary, but we also recognize the importance of the Indigenous woman as the authority in storytelling. While the number of Indigenous documentarians is on the rise here in Canada, there is also a rise in women as documentarians. They are using traditional forms of documentary and employing new technology to reflect and express our diverse Indigeneity. There is a collective need to sustain and archive Indigenous knowledge and culture, perhaps this is what motivated the late Nancy Columbia with her films.

2.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, since the rise of Indigenous documentary in the 1960s, Indigenous documentarians have taken to documentary and all its diverse forms of artistic, investigative, and observational expression. Raheja reminds us that the work of Indigenous documentarians provides profoundly different ideas of the self and community from multiple modes of expressions. With the rise of Indigenous cinema, film and media scholarship claims that fourth wave cinema supported the advancement of Indigenous filmmaking; for example, the National Film Board of Canada initiatives have provided opportunity for Indigenous women in documentary (Foster and Evans 2014 pp. 224-225; Lewis 2006 pp. 28-31). The 60s was a transformational period in history especially for Indigenous peoples (Raheja, 2010). Recent Indigenous documentaries are moving away from the traditional model towards an innovative approach that confronts colonial ideologies. Documentary has become a significant conduit for
cultural expression, which includes collaboration, non-linear storytelling, preservation, as well as collective authorship. Pamela Wilson (2016) argues:

Any analysis of indigenous filmmaking will also examine various degrees of individual or collaborative authorship at all levels: the degree of scripting or pre planning; the negotiation of filming culturally sensitive material, locations, or persons; and any approval process needing the structure of authority or hierarchy and the division of labor (including division of roles based upon culturally significant categories such as gender, class, clans, status, or other classifications). (p. 93)

Each community carries the authority and power to define their own storytelling practices while exposing colonial untruths. The use of cultural stories locates the documentarian in the position of authority.

Indigenous documentary diverges from mainstream in diverse ways regarding cultural logic and how the story is disseminated. The dissemination of story is deeply embedded in the storytelling process and the responsibility of content production as it relates to protocol. Indigenous knowledge systems shape our documentary practices, personalizing the content as part of cultural knowledge. Exploring the role of the Indigenous documentarian exposes shifts in power, which in turn reveals how our voices have been silenced by mainstream media. The use of documentary has proven to empower Indigenous documentarians, using technology toward documentary as an authoring tool to correct misrepresentations.
Chapter 3: Theoretical Frameworks

I begin this chapter with the poem, *WikWam* (Koostachin, 2018), from my book of poetry, “Unearthing Secrets, Gathering Truths” to describe my experience in what is now called northern Ontario. I was raised by *InNiNeWak* grandparents in Moosonee, and they only spoke *InNiNiMoWin*. This poem speaks to the deep love and affection I carry for my late grandparents and their way of life. *WikWam* reflects the resiliency and strength of my family, and how they survive colonialism by upholding our Ancestral knowledge.

**Poem 3  WikWam**

*IsKweWak*
slowly emerging
tundra hugs their cold bare feet
absorbing the red soil
swallowing warmth
centering the being
walls tied together with sinew
intestine
leather becomes my veil
veil of red *AsKi*
Earth
camouflaging
protection
steering me away from the lies
untruths told
misleading stories of us
the human beings
*MoshKeKoWok*
*InNiNeWak*
standing tall
together
*WikWam*

This chapter will explore my theoretical framework *MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit*, with a respectful acknowledgment of its roots, and I will investigate two
supporting, linked frameworks: Indigenous Storytelling and Decolonizing Documentary. I will also discuss how my framework contributes to the existing scholarship. This doctoral study is concerned with our positionality in relation to the stories we tell. I will draw on both the experiences of my Indigenous colleagues in the field and my own documentary practice. I also examine relationship to story from two perspectives: the theoretical and the practical while exploring the following theoretical approaches to documentary and how they relate to my study.

3.1 MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit Framework

My experience as a documentarian has shown me how our practices create opportunities for meaningful exchange from both within communities and beyond. As a documentarian myself, my reflections and research throughout this dissertation will contribute to the existing scholarship of documentary theory. My study is concerned with the links between how we as Indigenous documentarians share our stories, and with the origins of orality, which is the root of Indigenous storytelling practice. According to Kovach (2010) “Oral stories are born of connections within the world and are thus recounted relationally. They tie us with our past and provide a basis for continuity with future generations. Stories originating from oral traditions resonate and engender personal meaning” (p. 94). My connection to Indigenous story is integral to my learning of InNiNeWak cultural practice, and in embracing who I am as an InNiNew IsKwew. “Stories have the power to make our hearts, minds, bodies, and spirits work together” (Archibald 2014 p. 12). It is through my story that I claim my power as an IsKwew InNiNew, and it is through storytelling in all its incredible forms that I receive gifts of compassion, love and strength from my relations.

In regards to my own positionality, which essentially is my familial story, I was raised by my InNiNeWak grandparents in the MoshKeKo AsKi and have witnessed firsthand the ways our
orality sustains and uphold our culture, language and ways of being. Through the gathering, sharing and repetition of community story, we keep our stories from being forgotten and this was practiced for generations. As an Indigenous documentarian, documentary has allowed me the privilege of recording stories and sharing them with a wider audience. As the director of my documentary, I become the new author of the story, and therefore am obliged to respect the roots and follow protocol when the story is in my care.

*MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit* is rooted in Indigenous theoretical approaches that decolonize documentary methods, promote self-determination, and Indigenous “visual sovereignty” in which Indigenous documentarians have control over production (Dowell, 2013). “Michelle Raheja championed the concept of *visual sovereignty* from a Native American perspective” (Wilson 2016 p. 94). Many of us who refer to ourselves as Indigenous documentarians / researchers share similar colonial experiences, and we strive for recognition and we work to reframe our image to assert a distinct cultural identity. According to Kovach (2010), the story of Indigenous peoples is bound up in the story of decolonization, she writes:

A decolonizing agenda must be incorporated within contemporary explorations of Indigenous inquiry because of the persisting colonial influence on Indigenous representation and voice in research. Furthermore, a decolonized agenda is a forceful unifier that continues to shape our distinctive experience as an Indigenous collective. (p. 81)

As an Indigenous documentarian/researcher my work is symbolic and carries purpose in organizing my own resistance. It is evident in my work, either that be writing, documentary and academia, that I struggle for recognition, self-determination, and sovereignty. Therefore, it is appropriate that my research explores the importance of sustaining our diverse Indigenous
knowledge systems, cultural context and practices through the art of documentary. In confronting colonial narratives, my theoretical framework will allow for an extensive and explorative way to investigate methodological problems that documentarians encounter in theory and practice. By applying my framework to my dissertation process, I also allow myself to fully investigate how Indigenous paradigms, based on our worldview, are entrenched in our positionality. My research will also show how Indigenous documentaries have countered settler-colonialism by generating a form of self-representation that impedes colonial constructs and western paradigms. I also explore how our approaches to cultural understanding have created entirely new responses, doing away with discriminatory ideals marked in the colonial form of documentary, understood as an ethnographic observational tool (e.g., *Nanook of the North* (1922)). Ethnographic narratives reduced Indigenous peoples to passive, simple, and one-dimensional, but Indigenous documentarians are reclaiming and reconstructing our images by promoting and honouring Indigenous memory.

*MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Uearthing Spirit* explores how our stories – *memory* - strengthen our relationships, and most significantly how we are accountable and responsible to our communities, and to the story itself. Using my framework as a research guide, I address my research question, and uncover how documentary as a storytelling method has been exceptionally fitting for Indigenous documentarians because of its link to orality. “Given the philosophical basis of complementary, non-binary Indigenous thought pattern, it makes sense that narrative encased in the form of oral history would be the natural means to transmit knowledge” (Kovach 2010 p. 60). I concur, and I argue that when we create from collective narratives, we strive to embody Indigenous knowledge and the memory of our Ancestors. Of
course, orality still plays a significant role in our lives, and Indigenous documentaries are capturing elements of old stories – the narratives that sustain our connection to culture.

I also expand on existing scholarship regarding Indigenous documentary and its connection to orality. For instance, in interviews we record, not only the subject’s image, but also their voice – their stories. We engage with subjects by asking specific questions related to our documentary subject matter: our central question. We listen from behind the camera as they tell stories, share personal experiences and oftentimes, if trust has been established, they share intimate details about very private matters. Documentarians allow viewers to engage with story to locate their own understanding and connection to the story. The interpretation of story becomes the responsibility of the viewer, which is an important form of knowledge exchange, similar to orality. Documentary also captures individuals or communities in their natural environment, which helps in connecting the viewer to them, and works to capture the subject/s relationship to their world. Lee Maracle (1992), of the Sto:lo/Coast Salish Nation defines orality as a “place of prayer, to persuade. …story is the most persuasive and sensible way to present the accumulated thoughts and values of a people” (p. 87). I agree, and stress that the only difference between documentary and orality is that with documentary we are using a recording tool: The camera captures our cultural knowledge, and when we receive story in a traditional sense, we rely more on memory. Perhaps why I enjoy documentary as a storytelling platform is that as an InNiNew, I come from a culture where we observe and listen – our engagement with our Elders and Knowledge Keepers is observational and we also learn by listening to the stories that the old ones share in our communities. Elder Louis Bird (2007) asserts, “Native oral traditions are not fixed, static, inflexible, or always consistent, but that they vary according to the context of the telling and the background, intentions, and even mood of the storyteller” (p. 64). We walk away
with our own interpretation and learn what we are ready to learn at the time, just as one would experience after viewing a documentary. I grew up with InNiNeWak grandparents who lived off the land and spent a lot of time listening to their stories and observing them as they prepped game for the purpose of nourishing our bodies, mind, and spirit. I will always hold dear the time spent with my grandparents; I am proud that I come from a strong line of resilient InNiNeWak storytellers.

My documentary work and my culture are the same because the stories I share emphasize spirituality, connection to my Ancestral lands, ceremony, and language. Therefore, I believe the camera is similar to our orality, since documentarians can use it to observe Ancestral stories and the birthing of new interpretation of stories. In my experience, the camera itself never lies – it captures syntax, cadence, thoughts, and expressions, which is an incredible gift especially when we start losing the old ones. The footage then becomes an archive of sorts, where stories, images and voices are captured for the next generation to engage with. Tewa scholar Gregory Cajete (1994) reinforces that story is a crucial and fundamental foundation of all human learning and teaching (p. 23). These bundles of story – archives – contain power and are meant for the continuation of shared knowledge for the next generation. According to Wilson (2016) there are many levels to our storytelling practice, including the sacred stories that embody our survivance as a people (p. 89). My personal experience, my survival as an Indigenous person, and my understanding of InNiNeWak teachings are embedded in respect and the responsibility. Caring for story is an honour because many of the cultural stories I unearth are considered sacred.

Story honours and reflects our connectedness to our cultural teachings and to place – our Ancestral lands. Indigenous mythos forms our foundation for our culture’s guiding vision, a culture’s story of itself (Cajete p. 24). Just as we did in the past when we sat with our Elders and
Knowledge Keepers to listen to their stories, we are creating the same opportunities through documentary. Elders are important in the process of recovery and resistance to colonial realities and in reinsertion of the importance of remembering our past and remaking our futures (Iseke 2013). Scholars Hulan and Eigenbord (2008) also argue that the conduit of exchange exists in many extraordinary ways, allowing community to reconnect with an Indigenous ethos. They state:

Oral traditions are a distinct way of knowing and the means by which knowledge is reproduced, preserved and conveyed from generation to generation. Our oral traditions form the foundation of Aboriginal societies, connecting speakers to the listener in the communal experience and uniting past and present in memory. (p. 7)

They propose that the temporality of oral tradition transcends time and space, informing and influencing the way we think of stories today. Iseke (2013) notes, “Storytelling as witnessing and remembering allows engagement with ideas of the past and supports transforming ourselves today” (p. 572). Like documentary, orality is an immediate intervention strengthening Indigenous spirit, all the while, reconnecting audiences to their culture, community, and in some cases their Ancestral lands. Its formation is never conclusive, and like the art of filmic expression – the art of living – no two experiences and responses are ever the same. Kovach (2010) explains that our communities are gifted with an abundance of stories from across Turtle Island, and that there are some that are mythological, which are intended to share and ones she refers to as personal stories (p. 94). Our personal narratives teach of our responsibility to uphold morals codes and the their/his/herstories of our communities. For the most part, the stories we tell as Indigenous documentarians are personal and carry the capacity to morph and grow. Incredibly, our individual responses to stories will always be different because we come from different
walks of life, proving that our stories carry agency. Based on my experience working in the film and television industry, I have found that a good, solid story has the power to transform our thoughts, ideas and perceptions. A profound story is deep, complex, and penetrates the soul in a way that sparks curiosity or even change.

Esteemed documentarian Alanis Obomsawin positions documentary as a methodological approach to story is parallel to the art of oral storytelling: “I am very fussy about sound... I come from a place where hearing and listening to people is important” (as cited in Lewis 2006 p. 64). After engaging with her documentaries for several decades, I can attest that the sound in her films is flawless, and the narration of an Indigenous woman has a way of inviting viewers into the story, they may not otherwise engage with. Not unlike Obomsawin, Steven Leuthold (1998) suggests that Indigenous people regard documentary as a form of historical truth speaking and a way to strip away illusions of the settler colonialism. Art is understood as sacred for many Indigenous peoples, and so, for Indigenous documentarians and viewers alike, the documentary, with its familiar reliance on storytelling, offers a compelling mechanism for preserving and publicizing Indigenous their/his/herstories (p. 201). Documentary is an engine for change, and moves viewers to confront issues in meaningful ways, and as seen in Obomsawin’s work, it is evident that she honours connection with community and that she has made a commitment to focus on Indigenous issues.

As a documentarian, I understand story as a means of paying respect to the past, present, and future. Story is a pedological tool for learning life lessons and as Elder Tom McCallum explains:

We include a lot of things in storytelling that we leave for the other person to be able to interpret themselves. It gets their mind going. It puts their experience together and
validates them as a person who has the ability to be able to draw from that storytelling and relate it to their own lives. (Iseke and Brennus 2011 p. 249).

Storytelling in all its diverse forms encourages the listener/viewer to consider the relationship between themselves and the story being shared. According to Hsieh (2017), “In Indigenous cosmologies, the world is made up of multiple dimensions and interactive relationships between humans and other species, nonhumans, and the natural world, which can be understood as multispecies ethnography” (p. 177). Elders and Knowledge Keepers are the keepers of story, and they are obligated to keep them alive. Stories carry agency and they often draw on other dimensional narratives, as well as personal or communal experiences where we as listeners are invited to engage with spiritual worlds or ceremonial landscapes.

As a framework, MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit speaks to the importance of acknowledging from where our stories come from, and my story of unearthing begins with my foremothers. It also describes how we are obligated to treat Indigenous story as a being. Also, cultural protocols play an important role in our process as documentarians, and it is our work to ensure that we correct any misinformation before dissemination. It is necessary that we educate ourselves in our own knowledge systems before proceeding and declare our relationship to the spirit of the story we are sharing. Elder Louis Bird (2007) shares that “the spiritual need is introduced in the stories” and as soon as a person understands, listens and engages, they can put it into practice (p. 42). I was raised by MoshKeKo AsKi Elders and this life lesson has deeply informed my storytelling practice. Elders believe that “the mind is where the spirit lives” and the mind is the structure of a person (Bird, 2007, p. 44). The more we believe in the self as powerful, the stronger we are as a people. These significant cultural teachings shape individuals and communities and as Bird (2007) teaches us, “it’s like having a law inside your head” (p. 44). Our
Elders, conduits of Indigenous story, are our source of knowledge and it is through sharing story that we understand what it is to live a good life.

Indigenous documentarians are expected to understand their own relationship to the story and what that means to the community and to themselves – an ethical consideration carries a lot of weight in Indigenous community. Of course, documentary as a storytelling platform influences the form and the content of narrative, and also the creative process, but for Indigenous documentarians it demands being responsible and accountability to story, meaning that we take responsibility for how we approach story, and for our personal actions when telling the story. Following protocol is central to storytelling because it demonstrates the importance of respecting community expectations. Indigenous documentary is grounded in a relational approach to story, and for the most part centralized in our practice/framework, and that responsibility manifests throughout our approaches in the form of protocol. For example, when I engage with cultural knowledge through my documentary work (e.g., PLACEnta, APishKweShiMon, and OshKiKiShiKaw), I am aware of my responsibilities, both ethical and professional, as a documentarian; I make ethical choices about what I film throughout all phases of my productions.

3.2 Supporting Conceptual Frameworks

The two conceptual frameworks that most support my framework are MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit are Indigenous Storytelling and Decolonizing Documentary. The common theme of the study of story and the interpretation of experiences and accounts prevails in all these approaches and theories.
3.2.1 Indigenous Storytelling

*Indigenous Storytelling* is the study of the cultural activity of sharing stories as a means of interpreting experiences, cultural preservation, and instilling moral values (Dudemaine et al. 2020 p. 28). As Indigenous documentarians, our methodologies are instrumental in the storytelling process, particularly if we aim to tell the story right, meaning that we follow protocol and take the lead from the community or the individual we are working with. Similar to documentary, we employ values, protocols, and philosophies deeply rooted in Indigenous research methodologies (Smith, 2012). An Indigenous documentary approach to story creates space for individual and collective differences; for the most part, our methods as Indigenous storytellers are holistic, all the while encompassing protocols and customary practices according to from where the story originated from (Archibald 2012 p. 37). Sharing story implies teaching and for the learner it means understanding the significance of following protocol. Many Indigenous storytellers aim to engage with audiences through the documentary platform by permitting time to reflect, contemplate, and most importantly, question the context of the story, just as we would when telling stories around the kitchen table over tea and bannock. There are many Indigenous storytellers who may not produce documentary media from the same stance or even share similar sentiments in regards to Indigenous epistemologies – and rightfully so – yet the range of Indigenous story clearly demonstrates the diversity of social locations and realities that exist across Turtle Island. Indigenous story is heterogeneous and can produce individual works that do not resemble each other, yet we all come from these lands.

Our stories have a way of reconnecting individuals and communities with each other and the past. They bring us together. Stories help Indigenous people understand our roots, our connection to the spirit realm, and most importantly to root us to place (Pearce and Louis 2008 p.
114). I have learned that place is not confined to the land but intertwined with waking dreams which is fluid and sacred. Some refer to our stories as waking dreams, as they are part of our visual narrative constructs. We recognize that our stories are critical teaching tools, and it is important that we allow the people we interview to speak for themselves. Our value systems are embedded in our storytelling practices and an intrinsic part of our ways of knowing. To ensure cultural integrity we need to take responsibility by engaging proper protocols, cultural exchanges and respectful actions, and this positioning informs our Indigenous production practices. “The term, protocol, refers to any one of a number of culturally ordained actions and statements, established by ancient tradition than an individual completes to establish a relationship with another person from whom the individual makes a request” (Lightning 1992 p. 216). Examples include the work of documentarians, such as the award-winning Tasha Hubbard of We Will Stand Up (2019), Gil Cardinal, known for Foster Child (1987), Willie Dunn, director of Ballad of Crowfoot (1968), Alanis Obomsawin, director of over fifty NFB documentaries, award-winning filmmaker Loretta Todd and others whose documentaries not only speak to the importance of our orality, but also focus on Indigeneity in their practice. For instance, documentary matriarchs Obomsawin and Todd have successfully reinvented the documentary form to respond Canadian national identity, according to Gauthier (2013):

> While both women make documentaries, they have each created a distinct approach to the genre. Despite their differences, Obomsawin and Todd share a strong interest in chronicling the lives of Indigenous peoples, paying specific attention to their struggle for sovereignty and state recognition. Their documentaries seek to empower First Nations people through giving voice to the voiceless, bearing witness to Canada’s acts of racism, and challenging official history. (p. 90)
They both have produced a body of work rooted in Indigenous story that is accessible to not only Indigenous viewers, but also settler Canadians. They have used documentary to speak back to settler colonialism by communicating Indigenous *their/his/herstory* and culture.

Over the last several decades, documentary has experienced an extraordinary shift in pedagogy, ideologies, and methodologies, but in the early 1900s the colonial (*traditional*) documentary filmic approach was solemnly intended to record facets of *real life* for the purposes of institutional education and collecting historical evidence. Early documentaries reproduce colonial discourses and disseminate the idea of Indigenous peoples as the vanishing *other*. Pearson and Knabe (2015) state, “The ‘truth’ produced by these early cameras and the filmmakers behind them was, by and large, a visual exploration and commemoration of what were assumed, at the start of the twentieth century, to be rapidly vanishing Indigenous lives and cultures” (p. 3).

Documentary as a research practice fostered an explicit social agenda of erasure, and soon became an influential instrument of persuasion for white audiences (Alia 2010 p. 150). Anthropologist Renato Rosaldo states (1989), “The peculiarity of their yearning, of course, is that agents of colonialism long for the very forms of life they intentionally altered or destroyed” (p. 69). To think of Indigenous people only existing in the past and existing in the present as spectral entities participates in what Rosaldo calls “imperialist nostalgia” (Raheja 2013 p. 108). Indeed, as documentaries became increasingly common as a research tool, it became increasingly difficult to tell the *truth* from fiction. These early filmic representations denigrate Indigenous people and reproduce Eurocentric ideologies (Leuthold 1998 p. 61). Scholars such as Harald Prins (2002) argues that the vanishing *Indian* image fostered the hypothesis of a *pre-contact*
Indigenous culture; in turn their collective intent as settler researchers was to eliminate the appearance of white society’s influence.

Although it is true that indigenous peoples have long been portrayed along the lines of a dominant society’s primitivist’s ideology, evidence suggests that tribes-people who willingly posed or performed for strangers had their own perceptions about the politics of visual representation. (Prins 2002 p. 62)

While we found ourselves shrouded by the ever-present colonial gaze, we have successfully intervened. Media scholars Wilson and Stewart claim (2008), “Indigenous peoples . . . have appropriated the technologies of the dominant society and transformed them to their own uses in order to meet their own cultural and political need” (p. 3). Documentarians explore meaning through the narratives and aesthetics they engage with, and these transformative forms of expression transpire with respect, accountability, and knowing. At the same time, documentarians transform narrative and aesthetics, and explore forms of expression that are embedded in knowledge systems. There is a deep desire to tell stories on Indigenous terms and promote a style of storytelling that originates from our communities.

3.2.2 Decolonizing Documentary

Decolonizing Documentary involves the process of examining the approaches and the protocols of Indigenous documentarians. Documentaries by Indigenous documentarians have more of a filmed reality appearance, pursuing of truth with hopes of raising the stakes and creating awareness regarding the Indigenous experience. Indigenous documentarians found themselves working in the film industry, both in front of the camera and as writers, producers, and directors.
The birth of Indigenous film was in 1968 at the Montreal office of the National Film Board. Our story warriors cleared the path for the next generation of documentarians. During this time, Indigenous political movements were on the rise; political activism coincided with the new understanding that research methods, technology, and various modes of artistic expression could be utilized, not only as a tool of reclamation, but mobility. An example of one of leading warriors is Alanis Obomsawin, one of the most acclaimed and recognized Indigenous filmmakers in the world, made her very first film, *Christmas at Moose Factory (where I was born)*, through the National Film Board in 1971. Obomsawin came to cinema from performance and storytelling and was originally hired as a consultant in 1967. Alanis has since made over 50 documentary films all of which have been produced through the NFB. We hope to make impacts both within our communities and beyond, for example, Obomsawin’s *Richard Cardinal: Cry from a Diary of a Metis Child* (1986) changed Canadian legislation. Documentary theory is the study of documentary as a means to provide evidence or contrast with a subject’s account by observing life defined as the *creative treatment of actuality* (Bruzzi, 2002 p. 8). Documentaries are a creative source of knowledge that can shift an audience’s perspectives, all the while encouraging connection and informing our audiences about a particular lived experience and reality.

Decolonizing documentary is a response to colonial misrepresentations of Indigeneity, including shifting perspectives, and validating Indigenous voices. It not only highlights socio-political issues, but also focuses on stories that reflect our experiences and concentrate on the process of storytelling. The perspectives, ideas and interpretations of documentarians are based on their own creative process. Documentaries are the exploration of an Indigenous frame of reference with the consideration of decolonizing documentary. Stories explored by Indigenous
documentarians are, for the most part, culturally informed and a translation of values, ideas, and beliefs. The revitalization of documentary by Indigenous storytellers integrates preservation, sustainability, and advocacy to uphold culturally based stories. Scholars Dudemaine et al. (2020) states “Indigenous creators taking control of the camera—historically aimed at them by non-Indigenous anthropologists—and repeatedly curating events to disseminate Indigenous film represent various decolonizing acts that generate spaces for dialogue and ensure the deployment of Indigenous languages and epistemologies” (p. 51). Documentary represents acts of decolonization that produce space for necessary dialogue so to ensure the deployment of Indigenous epistemologies (Dowell 2013 p. 149). The foundation of Indigenous documentary lies in the applicability of Indigenous perspective in documentary theory. According to Iseke and Moore (2011) “Indigenous digital storytelling is based in Indigenous theory, and it is through establishing respectful relationships that trust is established” (p. 21). Therefore, for Indigenous documentary, we need methodologies that deconstruct power dynamics between the documentarian and the subject, and employ methods that centre on building relationship. There is also a danger in interpreting the stories we are gifted with; therefore, positioning ourselves relative to the stories can be a strategy to decolonize documentary. Approaches, whether that be documentary or research methodologies, to understanding Indigeneity preserve Indigenous voices, build resistance, and strengthen community (Datta 2018 p. 36). Documentary theories, methods and approaches vary from documentarian to documentarian, with and depend on their goals.

The sharing of stories unites documentary practice and ethics. For documentarians, storytelling is an important means of expressing knowledge, lived experience and orality that privileges collaboration, reciprocity, and connection. Our values, principles, and beliefs are often
central to our storytelling practice. Stories help us engage with the ethics of documentary. Documentary ethics and practices are often characterized by the desire to situate individual moral judgment within specific contexts such as Indigenous subjects and subject matter around consent, power, and trust (Marrubio & Buffalohead, 2006). Decolonizing documentary considers how narratives are constructed and shape perception, and while Indigenous people have resisted colonialism, we continue to reverse the effects by reclaiming our stories. Colonial narratives have constructed Indigenous people as a vanishing race, fixed in the past. There is a tension between the rhetoric of the vanishing other and self-representation and so, Indigenous narrative from our own perspective emphasize present-day agency (Raheja 2013 p. 122). We exist, and we continue to challenge the colonial technique of erasure. I am privileged that I was born into an InNiNeWak family, a community of MoshKeKo AsKi InNiNeWak who carry thousands of years of story in their blood memory, DNA of narratives that run deep into time.

In film history the term “documentary” is not synonymous with “non-fiction,” but has moved beyond denial of fictionality. Documentary of the sort associated with Flaherty or Grierson have been labeled as creative treatments of actuality. Interestingly, traditional documentary highlights the artistic dimension of nonfictional storytelling (Zipfel, 2014, p. 115). The documentarian intends the viewer to believe that the documentary is a testament to truth-telling. Furthermore, documentary is defined by the relevance of sense-bearing signs, wherein the storyteller intends the viewers to regard the images as factual, as in the case of Flaherty (Lewis 2006 p. 127). Documentary can also be understood as a vehicle for presenting the documentarian’s intentions and values. Nowadays, documentary theory is marked with conflict – reforming tradition with innovative ideas and concepts. Bill Nichols among other documentary theorist have embarked on a reawakening in documentary theory (Bruzzi, 2002, p. 48).
Documentary theorists have posed epistemological, methodological, and ideological concerns regarding documentary as representing reality. Grierson (NFB) had a strong deep-rooted influence on documentary theory. His notion of social documentation changed the world, an idea embedded in the hope that common folk would one day see themselves on screen, and this captured the attention of Indigenous documentarian Alanis Obomsawin. She saw Indigenous people as agents of their own fate who rejected dependent relationships with the state, and she suggests that the struggle of Indigenous people is best addressed within an Indigenous context (Lewis, 2006, p. 129). Documentary is an important storytelling platform for Indigenous documentarians because it amplifies voices and conveys Indigenous knowledge. “I think this is where documentary filmmaking becomes such an important way of preserving and teaching and making sure people have a place to speak. It changes society. It brings knowledge [about] the others that you always call the others” (Lewis 2006 p. 138). Documentary effects societal change, and conveys an ethos of universalism, which is fundamental in practice. In Obomsawin’s blend of observational and participatory mode of documentary storytelling, her commitment to social activism is evident. Jennifer Gauthier (2013) states, “In her unique blend of the observational and participatory modes, Obomsawin builds upon Grierson’s commitment to social activism and education, positioning herself as an active citizen who is sharing her knowledge with the rest of Canada. Her goal of advancing a specific moral point of view is evident and rooted in the Griersonian tradition” (p. 96). Obomsawin is known around the globe as a social documentary style, and she works to redefine how settlers understand Indigeneity in Canada. Her work reflects the documentary movement toward visual sovereignty.

Years ago, when I was exploring my own voice as an Indigenous documentarian, I found it inspiring to hear Obomsawin’s voice instead of that of a didactic white cis male. I remember
thinking if she has a voice in her storytelling process, then I do as well. Obomsawin replaces the overshadowing didactic authoritative voiceover traditional to ethnographic documentary with her own voice, that of an Indigenous person, as narrator (e.g., *Incident at Restigouche* (1984), *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (1993) and several others of her documentaries). Obomsawin utilizes her voice persuasively and strategically to activate compassion and responsiveness from the audience, including viewers who may not be used to hearing an Indigenous perspective. Her films offer an opportunity to acquire another view of humanity: The *Native* not as other, but as human. For too long, documentaries about us have been told from outside of our communities, and so this shift with Indigenous person as storyteller has certainly created an irreversible transference in documentary practice.

Furthermore, we should not pretend that documentary presents an objective truth, but rather acknowledge our biases. The decision of what to share and who is to share Indigenous story now lies in the hands of Indigenous documentarians. Although there is some degree of fictionalization in any documentary, there is also the truth that lives in the story. “Truth, in a social setting, however, is relative to the teller” (O’Brien 2001 p. 5). Documentary invites viewers to engage, and the audience carries the expectation that the documentary represents the truth. The truth can be skewed by how the documentarian chooses to present the story. We are invited to witness and engage with a wide range of perspectives, that offer social and cultural values. Documentary can inform and entertain, highlighting issues pertaining to the world in which we live, and Indigenous documentarians are applying Indigenous ways of being to the production of documentary.

Documentary can be an effective way to communicate Indigenous narratives. Even while using technology to tell our stories, we are part of contemporary knowledge production. The
Indigenous subject/object has shifted from the experience of other to the vast mobilization of the Indigenous documentarian’s right represent themselves. We work to decolonize the image of other by integrating core values, principles, and ways of being and we do this by respecting customary storytelling protocols. Also, being internally responsible means that we must answer to our Elders, knowledge keepers, families, and communities and to ourselves. The technology has been adapted to suit our needs, without putting the integrity of the story at risk. Treating our interactions with the subject/s as meaningful cultural exchanges rather than formal interviews helps in finding balance.

    Documentary has become an inclusive platform for the Indigenous documentarian to engage with a subject matter from different cultural standpoints. Documentary in compassionate form has the ability to share diverse human experiences, transcending gender, race, and class, allowing viewers to understand each other. The margins of the western world are not lifeless or stagnant, they are full of love, kindness, pain and alive with hopes for a better future – we are human, and we have story full of meaning.

    In summary, Indigenous documentarians (re)inscribe the image of Indigenous people in the western imagination, challenging colonial history and discourse.

    Documentary might be a significant discourse of sobriety that warrants our attention as scholars, students, and filmmakers, but, frankly, it’s not reaching every demographic: a good portion of the general public is simply uninterested in what it has to say. (Lewis 2006 p. 146)

Yet, works by the Indigenous documentarian addresses settler-colonialism by generating self-representations that impede colonial constructs; moreover, Indigenous documentarians also strengthen approaches to cultural understanding. Research demonstrates that the stories we tell
offer entirely new responses, doing away with discriminatory colonial ideals and practices marked in the colonial (traditional) form of documentary. In addition, Indigenous scholars reveal through their research that by adhering to Indigenous documentary methodologies, we not only deepen our relationships to the story, we are challenging settler colonialism (Alia 2010 p. 109).

Over the years, I have witnessed the field and not surprisingly, storytellers have been more than willing to use documentary as a narrative platform for resurgence, reclamation, and resistance.

3.3 Conclusion

In closing, this chapter explored my theoretical framework MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit, with a respectful acknowledgment of its roots. I also investigated two supporting, linked frameworks: Indigenous Storytelling and Decolonizing Documentary. Further, I explored how my framework contributes to the existing scholarship. I drew on both the experiences of my Indigenous colleagues in the field and my own documentary practice exploring two perspectives: the theoretical and the practical while exploring the following theoretical approaches to documentary and how they related to my study.

The next chapter, Chapter four (4): Methodology and Analysis is sectioned off in two parts. The first section Methodology examines the ethical framework that guided my research. Also, I will discuss how my research came to my findings, and how I gathered my data: Method A: Outward Process, Method B: Inward Process and my Two-way Process. I will introduce the methodology I used to gather information for this study, which includes qualitative approaches such as interviews, exploration of documentaries, and reflexive self-analysis. The following chapter also outlines the ethical framework that guided this research by exploring how Indigenous documentary methods demonstrate that our approaches to story embody Indigenous values and principles that ensure reciprocity, accountability, and respect. The second section,
Analysis, provides an overview of two analysis methods, the outward and the inward process involved in the data collection. I will provide an overview of the Epistemology: 

*MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit* as a methodological approach and a pedagogical tool to explore the relationship between Indigenous ways of knowing and story. I introduce my participants and how I recruited them for this study, and how I came to approach them. I also discuss the interview process.
Chapter 4: Methodology and Analysis

In *Shaking Tent* (Koostachin, 2018), from my book of poetry *Unearthing Secrets, Gathering Truths*, I am writing to my experience living with my Kokoom (grandmother) Zabeth in what is now called Northern Ontario. We spent a lot of time going to the Catholic Church, but I never felt comfortable there. I was very curious about our own *InNiNeWak* ceremonies, but most people in my community had converted to Catholicism. This poem also speaks to walking away from the church and embracing our own cultural customs and practices. *Shaking Tent* reflects how we as Indigenous people struggle to return to the old ways because of colonial influences. The *Shaking Tent* ceremony is both ancient and sacred to the *InNiNeWak*, and we have used it to travel through time and space visiting other dimensions. It is a powerful reminder of the resiliency and strength of my people.

**Poem 4  Shaking Tent**

red blood scarf
soft and long
wrapped around my head
keeping my hair in place

I enter the portal

gospel music
out of tune
no shame
our language consumes me
pulling me home
plummeting me back from the dreamland
back into the pew
I am now beside *KoKoom* - grandmother
she prays under her breath
my heart hits hard against my armor of ribs
I want to get out of this place
church is not for me

Shaking Tent
heart thrashing
beating its way out of me
I take KoKoom’s hand in mine
we walk out the door
so this is sovereignty?
turning our back on their gods
returning to our own ceremonies
twirling about
euphoria
shaking tent sits abandoned
pleasured by our presence
it opens itself up to us
the passage to another dimension
Indian time machine
  no present
  no past
  no future
multiple dimensions
peace
spirits rejoice
celebrate the return
singing aloud
we pray together

KoKoom and I
I am the seer
they embrace us
love
reclamation
we share this spirit place
no time or in-between
Indian Spirits
Little People
WinTiKo – Hungry Spirit
OChiSkwaCho – Hairy Being
Tricksters assemble
revealing truths
they tease
gossip about the living
drinking hot root tea
roots sweeten the water
mixing in lard with their long skinny digits
radio bingo blasting
belly laughs
feasting on bannock and berries
they play poker too
with cigarettes burning
smokes hanging from their drying lips
this is the gathering of the shape shifters

they have been waiting for our return
they are the spirit beings
speaking ageless words
ridiculing the living
as trauma pollutes our minds
mocking the English spoken by Indians
English is a disease they scream
it is spreading from generation to generation
poisoning the link to the ancient ones
disengaging us from the old stories
stories with life
our words are strong
once connecting the living with the dead
now what do they do?

*KoKoom* and I dream
we enter through the passage way
traveling through time and space
shaking tent ceremony revived
Indian style
classy
resilience
exploring
we travel
witness the existence of other beings
  sky people
  entire relations converse
  there is no divide
nothing separates us from them
*AaTimWak* – dogs guard the portals
crows and ravens watch
  revitalization
  strength
*KoKoom* and I light the fire
  burning
  fire so big
flames lick the still air
  red
  orange
  blue
for the living to see

This chapter is sectioned off in two parts. The first section *Methodology* discusses my

*Epistemology: MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Uneartthing Spirit* as a methodological approach and as a pedagogical tool that guides this research, and I will discuss the intersection between documentary methods and Indigenous research methodologies. Next, I outline the methods that guided the research, which include a qualitative approach. Also, I will discuss the *Outward and Inward Process Methods*, which includes my method of analysis, how I have come to my findings, and I will describe both my processes in detail. *Method A: Outward Process* includes viewing documentary by the participants involved in this study, as a means to develop an understanding of their documentary modality, analyzing secondary literature, and the interview process. *Method B: Inward process* includes a reflexive self-analysis, whereby I situate myself within the research. Later, I will introduce the participants of this study and the detailed use of interviews and selected documentaries used to gather data. Also, included in this chapter is a
reintroduction of my study and research questions, and how I went about my self-study research process through a narrative inquiry. The second section Analysis provides an overview of my two analysis, the Outward and Inward Process Analysis, which involved data collection over the course of my studies. The Outward Process Analysis will discuss my strategy for analyzing the data and the Inward Process Analysis will outline my strategy for analyzing the data from my self-reflexive process.

4.1 Epistemology: MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing as a Methodology

The relationship between Indigenous ways of being and story resonate with collective and personal meaning. Therefore, a comprehension of Indigenous epistemological approach to our stories is fundamental to understanding how Indigenous documentary intersects with our position as documentarians and as researchers. Our stories carry agency and “Stories in Indigenous epistemologies are disruptive, sustaining, knowledge producing, and theory-in-action. Stories are decolonization theory in its most natural form” (Sium & Ritskes 2013 p. 5). At its core, much of this is really about how Indigenous methodologies and documentary methods are intertwined, and how documentary as a storytelling practice has proven to be an effective form of knowledge exchange, where we documentarians can potentially create meaningful change. There are several processes within any methodology – methods and knowledge belief systems that involve ethos (Kovach 2010 p. 97).

_MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit_ as an epistemology reveals how Indigenous research methodologies are central to the documentary process. In recognizing the importance of using a visual tool to observe, intervene and question, I have learned about how we engage with story as the documentarian, and in most cases, how we are also engaged as observers/listeners. My research allows for an examination of the significance of our own
their/his/herstories and cultural standpoints, and how we begin to assert and articulate our stories ourselves, in turn, providing an alterNative perspective.

In essence, the narrative is a way of grappling with the experience of others, and by honouring our own Indigenous documentary paradigms, we reject the notion of other; we begin to speak for ourselves and our stories start to signify an extensive alterNative scheme. In the careful act of MooNaHaTihtKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit we pay tribute and honour Indigenous ways of knowing, and our documentary practices, which often times are rooted in our customary ways of being continuously guided and informed by the generations before us. Documentary is both an art form and a form of knowledge transmission and plays a role in human understanding. As Cajete (1994) tells us, “learning is always a creative act” and as documentarians we are consistently engaged in making meaning (p. 24). Creating worlds through the practice of documentary and allowing for platform of knowledge exchange is key to our ability to navigate the world. Indigenous documentary practices attend to ontological characteristics, including place and temporality, which refers to the past, present and future. Documentary as a storytelling platform manifests time and space – and archives our experiences both collectively and individually.

Moreover, the deliteralization of knowledge opens the door for multiple forms of knowledge and its transmission, for example experiencing a situation through documentary allows for viewers to understand and empathize with a worldview other than their own. Scholars Knowles and Cole (2008) state:

It includes forms of representation that combine the foregoing modalities as well. These forms of representation give us access to expressive possibilities that would not be
possible without their presence. Technology provides new means during each generation for representational possibilities to be extended and diversified (p. 5).

In addition to the opportunity that technology presents, documentary as a media platform is a journey into the world of the storyteller and the subject/s involved. Also, in the act of sharing story, empathy leads to understanding, and to developing deeper insights, and because documentary is medium of expression, using the story to carry a message, and often times, raise awareness of complex issues. The ability to empathize with others through story is a pathway to compassion and understanding. Also, for the most part, our Indigenous perspective is still considered the alterNative to the mainstream representation of Indigenous reality and could perhaps tell viewer/listeners something about themselves in regard to reflecting on how they engage with the subject matter. Ginsburg (2002) asserts that Indigenous media makers “ask who has the right to control knowledge and what the consequences of the new circulation regimes introduced by digital technologies” (p. 289). Documentary is always changing and morphing and is becoming more accessible, manageable, and affordable, these changes in technology allow the Indigenous documentarian to pose critical questions to the viewers. Indigenous documentary offers new opportunities, and perhaps even, evolutionary practices. Of course, the documentarian must require knowledge and skills as technology changes, as well as be familiar with the subject matter to successfully create new pathways to understanding.

At the same time, Indigenous documentary can be defined as the systemic use of the documentarian’s artistic process: the making and creation of artistic expression. Essentially, documentarians design their own futures, clearing a pathway to resistance and authorship. Documentary is also a dynamic vehicle for understanding and engaging with the experience of others. For example, I use my arts practice to shed light on issues that are relevant to me and to
an Indigenous audience. As someone with extensive experience in the field of television and film I can report that documentary as a mode of communication and knowledge transmission is a powerful storytelling medium. Certainly, documentarians have experienced a shift in documentary methodologies; the colonial-traditional documentary filmic approach was solemnly intended to record facets of real life for the purposes of institutional education and collecting historical evidence. In traditional documentary, there lies a deep set of assumptions and ethnocentrism. But we are witnessing a shift in communication and knowledge production, where the Indigenous documentarian is now central to the storytelling. There is a will to tell stories on Indigenous terms, in terms of resistance to settler colonial representations of Indigeneity (Dudemaine et al., 2020 p. 27). In the spirit of Indigenous storytelling, documentary and all its forms, expresses the feelings and insights of the documentarian, which promotes understanding evoked by the documentarian’s journey, regardless if they are known to the audience or not. Furthermore, Indigenous documentary works in varied modes of documentary practice, producing content that expands documentary theory to consider taking in account an Indigenous point of view.

Documentary can either follow the lead of the subject/s or the documentarian, but in the end, it is the documentarian who makes the creative choices. “Indigenous media prioritize Indigenous voices and perspectives while producing content that supports, informs, educates, counterbalances and resists” (Burrows 2018 p. 1118). Despite the colonial history of documentary, documentary by Indigenous documentarians has become a way to achieve cultural sovereignty and autonomy. Including Indigenous documentarians in the filmic process ensures a pedagogical model where Indigenous perspective is centrally situated. Indigenous documentarians think relationally, and the very way of thinking shifts the western approach to
documentary storytelling – these are our relationships (Sium & Ritskes 2013 p. VII).

Documentary is now recognized as a necessary tool to retrieve familial and community story in meaningful and responsible ways. Kristin Dowell (2013) argues:

Sovereignty references a variety of domains in Aboriginal life from cultural to political to spiritual, and also …to the domain of media production. I define visual sovereignty as the articulation of Aboriginal peoples’ distinctive cultural traditions, political status, and collective identities through aesthetic and cinematic means. (p. 2)

I agree; to achieve cultural sovereignty, we must also acknowledge that we carry shared anxiety and distress in our communities. We need to acknowledge the impacts of colonization to address our resiliency, and in some cases our shared pain. Indigenous documentary can be understood as an act of healing, which in turn represents an act of sovereignty. The struggle for self-determination and agency, allows documentarians to create space for community voice.

In expressing our concerns as a community of documentarians, we can perhaps conjure an awakening, which will in turn, motivate the first phase of restoring balance, and most importantly spirit (self). There is renewal, reconnection, and awareness in the act of raising consciousness through documentary, and what follows closely behind is a collective movement, we are then, striving for sovereignty together (Million 2013 p. 16). In this paradigm shift, the very method of (re)storying Indigenous lives through our own lens has (re)awakened our communities (Cajete 1994 p. 69). It is in our stories that we are slowly purging ourselves by scrapping away at the colonial residue left over by centuries of dehumanizing us as peoples.

Indigenous story embodies collective and personal meanings; a comprehension of Indigenous epistemological approaches to story is fundamental to understanding how Indigenous documentary methods intersect with Indigenous research methodologies. To fully grasp
Indigenous storytelling practice in all its forms, it is necessary to explore our research methods and how they relate to Indigenous documentary practice. In respect to the diversity that exists within our Indigenous documentary practices, I reflect upon some of the storytelling approaches that inform our diverse ways of being and knowing.

Also, I consider the approaches to story that are deeply embedded in our orality, as well as the stories that are informed by our lived experiences as Indigenous people. In manipulating and re-working the traditional western form of documentary, Indigenous documentarians have worked to build capacity, and have successfully shifted ways of thinking. They have also created space for new and innovative approaches to documentary. Furthermore, Indigenous documentarians are also contributors in (re)capturing – with the camera – the spirit of our pre-settler existence. They attentively summon the stories back into our lives, stories that do not include the colonizer. According to Ginsburg (2002):

> Indigenous people are using screen media not to mask, but to recuperate their own collective stories and histories - some of them traumatic - that have been erased in the national narratives of the dominant culture in danger of being forgotten within local worlds as well. (p. 39)

Some stories by Indigenous people start with their experiences of colonialism. Although these stories are important, especially when trying to understand the trauma that lurks in all of us, it is also important to explore who we are without starting from a place of trauma and colonialism. Some would argue that is impossible, but if I am to honour my framework

*MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit,* we are unearthing our old narratives, stories that are often gifted to us in *PoWaMeWin* (in a dream state), my teachings tell me it is the way that our Ancestors communicate with us. To be absolutely clear, this is not a judgment to those who
are suffering and who are on their healing path, but I deem it necessary to also acknowledge that our stories precede colonialism – we need to embrace not only the roots, but the orality of our pre-settler narratives. Again, delving into our pre-settler existence can be healing and enlightening because we are paying homage to our Ancestors, and to our resilience as a people – we are still here because of the resiliency of our story.

It is inevitable that by replacing the misinformed single narratives found in mainstream representation – ones told by outsiders – a shift in documentary practices will gradually occur over time. Indeed, the single narrative of Indigenous peoples as exotic, erotic, and terrifying has been detrimental to our communities, so as Thomas King (2011) suggests in his book The Truth About Stories, our best defense against colonial misrepresentation is a good story (p. 89). The new wave of Indigenous documentarians will emerge and continue the work in ensuring an appropriate platform is available to share good Indigenous stories. Indigenous documentarians provide a peripheral perspective, unremittingly offering a more authentic, for lack of a better word, depicting surviving the margins of settler colonialism.

Furthermore, our stories give us a sense of self, guidance, and provision of clues as to how we lived our lives in the past, and also how we got to where we are today. According to scholar Beverly Singer (2010), orality is fundamental to understanding Indigenous film: “The oral tradition is a continually evolving process and is apparent in Aboriginal and native films and video, which are extensions of the past in our current lives” (p. 3). More so, as alternative approaches to Indigenous documentary upsurge, they disturb mainstream notions of Indigeneity as transparent, simplistic, and superficial, replacing the representation with a profoundly complex understanding of Indigenous identities. Historian Donald Fixico (2003) suggests, “Narrative and oral tradition produce a kind of social history, telling you also about the culture of
the people. Stories are clues of what they are like, what they like, and what they think are important in their lives” (p. 29). Instead of understanding us as people through the colonial gaze, we as documentarians have appropriated the camera for the sake of our communities and for our own sanity. Continuously battling misrepresentations about who we are as people can be quite exhausting. Scholar Margaret Kovach (2010) states, “In oral tradition, stories can never be decontextualized from the teller” (p. 94). I would push this notion further and say that we Indigenous receivers/listeners have a moral responsibility to the story being shared with us, because we perhaps have a connection to the source. Hence, as documentarians ourselves, we too have a moral responsibility not only the story, but to the community from which it is rooted; our exchanges are cultivated by the demands of our relationships, and without social allegiance, we risk damaging trust. As most are aware, our relationships are fundamental to our identity as Indigenous peoples; without our relations we risk being lost in this world.

Indigenous storytelling methods employ values, protocols, and philosophies deeply rooted in Indigenous research methodologies (Smith, 2012). The ideologies are intertwined, and documentary as a storytelling practice has proven to be an effective form of knowledge exchange. As theorist Houston Wood (2013) writes, “Indigenous filmmakers frequently adapt film technologies to reflect their own culture’s pre-existing visual and storytelling traditions” (p. 55). Of course, stories do define us and our values emerge from our practice, and although, documentary and Indigenous peoples have a hoary their/his/herstory, it has been over the last several decades that documentary, as an approach to story has really culminated.

Documentarians are in an interesting place in our practice, thanks to all the Indigenous storytellers before us who fought the fight.

Our methodologies in relation to Indigenous story allow for a distinctive voice to advance
meaningful engagement with community and communicate and employ methods of reciprocity. When paying attention to our own challenges as Indigenous documentarians, we are responsible for articulating our processes and methods. We are also responsible for not exploiting the stories bestowed upon us. Once gifted with a story from someone, or the community at large, Indigenous documentarians, in turn, are expected to nurture the story with the utmost respect. We need to understand that there will be a time when the stories we carry hold the spirit of the people before us, our stories represent the lives lived.

*MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit* employs that our stories are alive through us; if we do not share them with honour, they will lie dormant, and eventually fade, until they are awakened again. The voices of our Ancestors are breaking through once again, just as they have in the past, and they are finding refuge in our narratives today. Scholar Leroy Little Bear (2000) suggests that, “It is through stories that customs and values are taught and shared. In most Aboriginal societies, there are hundreds of stories of real-life experiences, spirits, creation, customs, and values” (p. 82). Additionally, it is through story that we learn of our responsibility as human beings, and work to find balance in our lives.

*MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit* as a research framework is steeped in an Indigenous methodology drawing from the teachings of my community. I am accountable and responsible to my family and to the people I have learned from in my documentary practice. I assert that there is power in documentary as a research methodology; in the age of globalization, technology has allowed for greater mobilization, reaffirming the rights and recognition of Indigeneity. My research proves that our values and principles as documentarians embody reciprocity, accountability, protocol, respect, and responsibility. Our methodologies as Indigenous documentarians are instrumental and required in the documentary practice,
particularly if we are successful and competent in telling the story right, and telling the story well, just as our Ancestors did before us.

4.2 Methods

Much of my research takes place on the University of British Columbia (UBC) Vancouver campus. I am aware of the protocols in regard to this study, wherein we acknowledge the land that the study is taking place on. There is an ethical code of conduct to follow to build relationship; mine is grounded in an InNiNeWak knowledge system informed by my Ancestral lands, the MoshKeKo. My methodology was also supported by the Indigenous documentarians who practice a wide range of storytelling methods (involved as participants in this research), as well as my committee members, fellow students, my instructors, Elders, Knowledge Keepers and my family and community back home. In both my roles as researcher and as a documentarian, I am aware of the significance of the cultural knowledge shared with me in formal and informal discussions. Thomas King (2011) reminds storytellers that we have to be cautious of the stories we share, and to be aware of the stories shared with us (p. 10). Therefore, as part of my methodology, I was careful to include the participants in my study when it came to interpreting and documenting their stories to ensure that the information presented was accurately depicted.

The need for this dissertation came to light during my career as a documentarian, and I argue for an alternative approach to documentary grounded in Indigenous values and principles. My study explores ways to create space that upholds Indigenous storytelling in documentary. Rooted in theory, MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit will frame my research, which in turn discusses how my framework will become a pedagogical tool for documentarians. My study also includes pertinent aspects of my graduate research in documentary media, and relevant research, furthering the exploration of our relationship to story, roles and
responsibilities, and the strategic and creative processes of documentarians. My research is a mix of participatory and self-reflexive study. I am mindful of the complexity of Indigenous methodology that I am navigating, and I am aware of the limitations of analyzing Indigenous narrative and practices through a western research discourse. Another complexity is how I, as an Indigenous researcher approach subjectivity, meaning that tribal epistemologies cannot disassociate from the subjective (Fast & Kovach 2019 p. 25). There are distinct differences in how we engage with Indigenous story, and I am also aware of misrepresentations and misunderstanding.

To embrace Indigenous methodologies is to accept subjective knowledge, where there is a contrast in our values and ideologies between western academia and Indigenous scholars. For the most part, I would argue that Indigenous scholars share the understanding that knowledge is bound by place. It is crucial to reflect on our shared knowledge, and the reasons why it is important to follow protocol before beginning any filmic process. When theorizing and developing an understanding of the knowledge shared with me, I am fully aware that my application is not relatable to all Indigenous people. I acknowledge that there are InNiNeWak principles and values informing my worldview, and as in the case with the documentarians in my study, they have their own set of values embedded in their stories.

4.2.1 Method A: Outward Process

During the outward process of my research, I reached out to several documentarians who identify as Indigenous. I have been working in the arts for over 30 years and have become quite familiar with community members and their diverse body of work. I started reaching out to several of my colleagues during the second year of my studies in 2016 and was met with acceptance by the five (5) participants introduced in this research. My goal was to capture a
scope of Indigenous documentary modalities in this research to demonstrate the creative approaches and practices. The participants in this study range from slow media, installation, documentary television, and stop motion. Soon after confirming the participants, I commenced my interview process.

I allotted approximately two hours per interview and ensured to introduce my area of study before commencing. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed. My selection of responses consisted of sections of their transcripts from the interview process, and not all questions were posed because there were some time constraints, and the conversations were more fluid than structured. In my inward process, I conducted a reflexive self-analysis of selected documentary works and contributed to this study by answering some of the same interview questions that were posed to my participants.

My *Outward* methods included:

1. Reviewed works by participants in this research as a means to develop an understanding of their documentary modality, creative processes, and contribution to Indigenous documentary theory;

2. Analyzing secondary literature as it pertains to Indigenous documentary practice, including examining of emerging themes, creative range, and cultural practice;

3. Conducting semi-structured interviews that involved five (5) Indigenous documentarians situated in Canada that represent first, second and third wave generations.

By reviewing their work and the processes of selected documentarians, I explored how our Indigeneity not only disrupts the colonial gaze, but also sustains and respects Indigenous
documentary methodologies, principles and values. Furthermore, by applying the methods outlined above, my study delves into how Indigenous documentary practices can offer self-determination, and an opportunity to self-identify. I uncover how in this act of self-agency documentarians have opened the door to redefine ways of being in innovative ways.

4.2.2 Method B: Inward Process

During the self-study process, I will share my thoughts and ideas regarding the interview questions, the same questions I posed to the participants during the outward process of this study. Later in chapter six (6), Inward Findings, I will provide an extensive examination of selected documentary media projects, which will draw upon my own experience (self-reflexive) as an InNiNew documentarian currently working in the industry. I have analyzed literature and media sources that examine a selection of my body of documentary work. I also reflect upon the same questions that were posed to the participants regarding the following themes: (1) Positionality, in relation to my experience of being introduced to documentary; (2) Documentary Modality, where I reflect upon the documentary platforms I have engaged with; (3) Cultural Methodology, where I write to my own personal cultural choices; (4) Emerging Themes, where I touch on themes in my documentary work; (5) (de) Colonialism as it relates to my own process; (6) Pre-Settler (InNiNew) Identity, where I explore how my identity impacts my documentary process, and lastly; (7) Accountability and Responsibility where I address how my work speaks to my documentary process as an act of resistance.

Overall, it was an important process to situate myself in the study because of my experience working in the industry as a documentarian. My KoKoom (grandmother) taught me that it is important to start with self when we speak to narrative, and to know our own story well before we tell the story of others. Documentary is story and ensuring that I was part of the
narrative was honouring an *InNiNeWak* custom and protocol. I became a participant in the research because my framework *MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit* is rooted in *InNiNeWak* ways of being and knowing.

### 4.2.3 Two-way Process: Outward and Inward

This section outlines my two-way processes, two distinct modes of collecting knowledge. During the outward process, I reflect on how documentary methods helped me understand the thematic responses by participants. After transcribing the participant’s interviews, I re-read and reflected on their responses to help me finalize my conclusions. The two-way process operates as mode of gathering information that is inclusive of my voice as an Indigenous documentarian, and my voice adds another layer to my study.

As an Indigenous PhD candidate at UBC, I understand the importance of moving beyond colonial modes of knowledge transfer. My research introduced my fellow documentarians in this study to my pedagogical model *MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit*, one they may consider relevant to the work that they do. Prior to commencing my interviews with the participants, I introduced myself, and shared my research goals, and my questions.

The following were my research goals:

1. *To provide a comprehensive analysis of Indigenous media literature/sources relating to our positionality as documentarians;*

2. *Document and analyze the functional, creative, and cultural processes for documentary by Indigenous documentarians.*
Prior to my interviews, I informed the participants of my **Research Question**: *How does our positionality as Indigenous documentarians shape our creativity, and the concepts, themes, and forms explored in documentary?*

Also, I informed participants of my **Sub-Questions**: *How does documentary deriving from Indigenous lived experience serve as a catalyst for colonial system change within Indigenous community and western mainstream media? How will narratives produced by Indigenous documentarians reflect our positionality, roles, responsibilities, and methodologies? How does our documentary work confront the colonial gaze? How does unearthing our pre-settler truth – stories - reveal and strengthen our ties to our past, present and the future?*

**Table 4.1 Summary of Methodology** It provides a brief overview my phases of analysis:

| Outward Methods | 1) Conducted interviews with five (5) Indigenous documentarians ranging in positionality, gender, age, modality and practice;  
|                 | 2) Interview questions were organized by the following themes (1) Positionality; (2) Documentary Modality; (3) Cultural Methodology; (4) Themes; (5) Colonialism; (6) Pre-Settler Identity, and lastly, (7) Accountability and Responsibility;  
|                 | 3) Review of participants (selected) documentary works to better understand their documentary modality, creative processes and their contribution to documentary practice. |
| Inward Methods  | 1) Review and critical reflection on my own documentary work as it relates to my research question and emerging themes from the interviews;  
|                 | 2) Review of secondary literature that relates to documentaries I produced. |
| Outward Analysis| 1) Analysis of interviews using secondary literature pertaining to documentary theory and methodologies and thematic analysis resulting in (5) five core themes. |
| Inward Analysis | 1) Reflexive self–analysis, which includes a brief commentary of the emerging themes from the interviews;  
|                 | 2) A reflexive self-analysis of my documentary work. |

Whenever I engage with Indigenous story, I find myself asking the following questions: *Who benefits from the story? Who is missing from the story? Who are the ones telling the story?*
Do they have the right to tell the story? When I say right, I mean I ask whether the documentarian followed protocol and asked permission to tell the story. The power of story is experienced through stories of stories (Archibald 2008 p. 85). The energy of story serves to revitalize the spirit, mind, and the body. When one does not have a relationship with the source of the story, or one does not have a relationship with the community, to tell that story is not to practice objectivity, as some have claimed . . . it is unethical. I would argue that following protocol and building relationship is an essential part of development and pre-production, and often during post and dissemination, with any subject matter. I often hear documentarians say that objectivity is key (Burrows, 2018). However, like Burrows, I do not believe any documentary is ever really objective, regardless of cultural background – the film will always be told from the documentarian’s perspective, and this is influenced by their socio-cultural location.

Indigenous people have had their identity clouded by the colonial lens since the beginning of film, and often even for centuries. Based on my experience in the field, I do not declare conflict of interest but rather say statement of relation because I believe that we are all related. In addition, when an outsider documentarian states they are objective because they are telling an Indigenous story from a distance, I argue that this objectivity has the potential to be destructive unless the filmmaker has fully acknowledged their privilege as a settler and decolonized their ideas and views of Indigeneity.

As part of my two-way process, I had meaningful discussions with participants where I journeyed into their individual and collective worlds of documentary storytelling. This process brought forth some of our shared knowledge, narratives, and conversations regarding documentary as a storytelling platform. I weave significant themes from the interviews and the stories I engaged with. I located similar threads in all five (5) interviews and included themes
that surfaced from my own responses to the interview questions. There are many ways of knowing in the Indigenous community, and instead of presenting the cultural information, experiences and stories shared as data, per se, I use the term share throughout this dissertation to demonstrate my respect to the participants. The word share because exemplifies my own cultural way of knowing and doing, and I also recognize that there are personal limitations in using the English language to discuss Indigenous knowledge systems and stories.

4.3 Participants

The participants in my study represent the diversity of Indigenous ways of being, and knowledge systems. I have chosen them based on their reputation as Indigenous documentarians in the community and their body of work that I respect and admire. Also, I wanted to have a range in terms of age, gender, creative process, and documentary modality, so each documentarian brought something different to the table. Some of my participants are just learning of their cultural identity, and others are deeply rooted in their identity. My questions were based on some of the questions that I have grappled with over the years as a person working in documentary. I often struggle with people from outside our communities telling our stories; I quickly came to the conclusion quite early in my career that, for the most part, they were getting it wrong. I am challenged with always trying to get it right, almost to a fault, but I am concerned because I know how painful misrepresentation can be for an individual or a community. This is personal for us. Our stories are sacred, and the stakes are high.

Evidently, central to our documentary practice is our responsibility to work with dedication and respect, so to ensure the way we construct story is culturally congruent with how Indigenous people make meaning with story. The storyteller’s responsibility is linked to the power of the story itself, and to the importance of practicing reciprocity (Archibald 2012).
Technology has been adapted to suit our diverse Indigenous documentary practices. But we documentarians are faced with many challenges when working in Indigenous communities, and at times we are educating non-Indigenous crews on key creative of projects of our protocols. We have to ensure the aesthetic choices are consistent with the community we are representing. Furthermore, we must regard Indigenous language as part of our soundscape, for example being specific to the language of the community and acknowledging that our languages are tied to a specific place. Facing these expectations is exhausting, but necessary.

The Demographic chart below provides an overview of each of Indigenous documentarians I interviewed. I have given their English names, Nation, age range, gender (as per participant) and practice in terms of their professional background. For the sake of this research, I have referred to the participants as documentarians, but this by no means indicates that this is the extent of their arts practice.

Table 4.2 Demographics, as seen below outlines the documentarians interviewed demographics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name/Nation/Location</th>
<th>Nation</th>
<th>Age range/Gender</th>
<th>Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amanda Strong</td>
<td>Metis</td>
<td>30s Female</td>
<td>Stop Motion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregory Coyes</td>
<td>Metis, Cree, Mohawk</td>
<td>60s Male</td>
<td>Television/Film/Slow Media: Decolonized Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorothy Christian</td>
<td>Shuswap/Syilx</td>
<td>60s Female</td>
<td>Television/Film</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracy German</td>
<td>Mohawk</td>
<td>40s Female</td>
<td>Television/Film</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dana Claxton</td>
<td>Sioux</td>
<td>50s Female</td>
<td>Installation/Film</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3.1 Participant Biographies:

I will introduce the participants/documentarians with the biographies that they provided for the purpose of this dissertation. Over the course of a few years from 2017 through to 2018, I interviewed five (5) Indigenous documentarians Dana Claxton, Amanda Strong, Tracy German,
Gregory Coyes, and Dr. Dorothy Christian. In chapter five (5) *Outward Findings*, I will bring forward parts of our conversation I had with each documentarian, who I believe are valuable contributors to the Indigenous documentary world. The conversations will bring up some important points regarding relationship to story and community, as well as cultural knowledge systems specific to their own Indigenous roots. They carry knowledge that has direct implications to the survivance of our cultural ways of being and stories. Every documentarian speaks to their own worldview, and how they treat cultural stories.

**Dana Claxton** was born in Yorkton, Saskatchewan, and her family reserve is Lakota First Nations – Wood Mountain, located in beautiful southwest Saskatchewan. Her paternal Euro-Canadian grandmother taught her how to harvest and preserve food and her maternal Lakota grandmother taught her to seek justice. Dana is the youngest of four siblings, an auntie, niece, cousin, and daughter. She works in film, video, photography, single- and multi-channel video installation, and performance art. Her practice investigates beauty, the body, the socio-political, and the spiritual. Her work has been shown internationally at the Museum of Modern Art, Walker Art Centre, Sundance Film Festival, Eiteljorg Museum, and the Museum of Contemporary Art (Sydney) and held in public collections including the Vancouver Art Gallery, National Gallery of Canada, Art Bank of Canada, and the Winnipeg Art Gallery. She has received numerous awards including the VIVA Award and the Eiteljorg Fellowship. Her work was selected for a Vancouver Art Gallery career survey (2018), the 17th Biennale of Sydney (2010), Biennale de Montréal (2007), Biennale d’art contemporain du Havre, France (2006), Micro Wave, Hong Kong (2005) Art Star Biennale, Ottawa (2005), and Wro 03 Media Arts Biennale Wroclaw Poland (2003). She has created commissioned works for the University of Lethbridge Gallery, Alternator Gallery, Winnipeg Art Gallery, Urban Shaman, Moose Jaw
Museum and Art Gallery, and Tribe. She has presented talks at the Getty Institute and the Art College Association and the Opening Week Forum of the Biennale of Sydney.

**Amanda Strong** is an urban Metis media artist and stop motion director currently based in Vancouver. She is the owner and director of Spotted Fawn Productions, an animation and media-based studio creating short films, commercial projects, and workshops. Amanda’s work explores ideas of blood memory and Indigenous ideology. Her background in photography, illustration and media extend into her award-winning stop motion animations. Her films *Indigo* (2014) and *Mia’* (2015) challenge conventional structures of storytelling in cinema and have screened internationally, most notably at Cannes, TIFF, VIFF, and OAIF. Amanda has received numerous grants from the Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council and the NFB most recently the recipient of the Vancouver Mayors Arts Award for Emerging Film.

**Tracy German** is a self-identified Aboriginal filmmaker of the Mohawk nation with 20 years production experience creating thought provoking and award-winning factual documentary, dramatic and experimental films. She holds an M.F.A. from York University in film production and a Media Arts diploma from Sheridan College. Her innovative and award-winning documentary, TV series and experimental film projects have screened internationally and locally and are currently being broadcasted on cable television. She is the showrunner for the exciting 13x30 min. documentary television series *Wild Archaeology*, broadcast on APTN and funded by the CMF. This award-winning documentary series features three talented aboriginal hosts that travel across Canada to tell the deep history of Indigenous inhabitation of the Canadian continent through the archaeological record combined with Indigenous oral history and contemporary indigenous culture. It also features an in-depth rich and immersive interactive
website produced in both English and Dakota Languages. Currently Tracy is in post-production with Season 2 of *Wild Archaeology* (2017/2018) broadcasted on APTN in 2019.

**Greg Coyes** is Metis/Cree from St. Albert, Alberta and has worked in the Indigenous media community over the last three decades as an award-winning documentary filmmaker, and as an educator and writer. He has produced and directed with the National Film Board and consulted and written for the Smithsonian at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC. A graduate of Yale University, Greg is currently teaching, and coordinating the Independent Indigenous Digital Filmmaking program at Capilano University in North Vancouver. His Master’s thesis focused on the SLOW MEDIA Community, which creates and promotes decolonized media, and an Indigenous sense of cinematic time and space.

**Dr. Dorothy Christian** Cucw-la7, PhD, is of the Secwepemc and Syilx Nations from the interior of BC. Her home community of Splatsin, is one of 17 communities that comprise the Secwepemc Nation. She is the eldest of 10, has one daughter and over 60 nieces, nephews, great nieces, and nephews. Dr. Christian currently serves as the Associate Director, Indigenous Initiatives at the Teaching and Learning Centre at SFU. Her research in academia has consistently centralized Indigenous knowledge even before those terms were recognized in the academy. In her undergraduate studies at the University of Toronto, Dorothy did a double major in Political Science and Religious Studies where she started comparing Indigenous thought with Euro-Western thought. Indigenous cultural knowledge informed both her MA at SFU’s School of Communications and her PhD at the Department of Educational Studies at UBC, which focused on Indigenous visual storytelling/filmmaking practices. In 2018 Dorothy’s guest curated the Voices from The Western Regions of Turtle Island program at the imagineNATIVE film festival in Toronto – the largest Indigenous film festival in the world.
4.3.2 Interview Questions

I have been so privileged to have spent time and sit with several of my colleagues working in the field. I posed questions about how their positionality ensures accountability and responsibility to Indigenous story. Many themes emerged from our conversations, with identity and cultural knowledge production as strong threads. My interview questions were separated by themes, and as mentioned, due to time constraints not all questions were posed. Furthermore, I enquired about how their own personification, functioning, and biases as Indigenous documentarians influenced their practice as documentarians. During the interview process I explored (1) positionality and the relationships we have with the stories we tell; (2) documentary modality, in relation to how we use documentary formats to tell our stories; (3) cultural methodology, in terms of what methods do they employ in their practice; (4) themes, what common threads emerged from all the interviews; (5) (de)colonialism, how do they personally and professionally decolonize the practice of documentary, (6) pre-settler identity, in relation to their connection to the stories that lived prior to the arrivals of settlers on these lands; and lastly (7) accountability and responsibility, in terms of the impact and influence of the stories they tell.

The purpose of my interviews is to provide an alterNative experience, knowledge and relevant topics that are addressed throughout the course of this study. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, and as mentioned previously quotations used from semi-structured interviews in the findings of this dissertation were checked with all documentarians.

The following are my interview questions based on emerging themes from my research, sectioned off based on significant themes:

- **Positionality:** Tell me about your cultural background? Where did you grow up? When and how did you come to understand yourself as a documentarian? Who are your most
important teachers/Knowledge Keepers and why? How and why does your Indigenous identity influence your arts practice? How does your positionality sustain and respect Indigenous storytelling methodologies, principles, and values? What was your most significant media work to date and why? What was your most challenging media work to date and why?

• **Documentary Modality:** Can you describe your arts practice? What does documentary mean to you? Describe your experience working in documentary? How is truth explored in your work? How does your work explore Indigenous realities and truth? How do you see our stories surviving in the margins of western society? When creating new work who are the audiences you have in mind? How does your work challenge western identity constructs? How have you as a documentarian adapted to the ever-expanding nature of technology?

• **Cultural Methodology:** Does your work capture the range of perspective on Indigenous story? What protocols do you have in place when sharing Indigenous story? How does your methodology as an Indigenous documentarian reveal the complexity and the limitations that exist within the practice? How do you approach challenging subject matter? How do you approach Indigenous community?

• **Emerging Themes:** What themes are most important to you as a documentarian? Are there re-occurring themes that emerge in your work? What themes would you like to explore in the future and why?

• **(de) Colonialism:** Our relationship with the field of documentary in Canada has been strained right from the beginning. Therefore, do you think Indigenous documentary can create meaningful change in the industry and why? How does your positionality and
methodology as an Indigenous documentarian disrupts the colonial gaze? How does your work address and/or confront colonialism in the field of documentary?

- **Pre-settler Identity**: What does pre-settler identity mean to you? Is it possible that we as Indigenous documentarians can locate the truth of our pre-settler self? How do reach beyond the historical confines of colonialism in relation to our identity and ways of knowing as Indigenous documentarians?

- **Accountability and Responsibility**: How do you ensure your work is accountable to the source, whether that be a community or an individual? How do you ensure you hold yourself responsible when working with Indigenous story? What is your creative process when working with story? How do you approach collectively owned stories?

Overall, the questions sparked a lot of meaningful dialogue regarding to our own practice, and we delved deep into our own documentary and storytelling methodology. The questions were meant to be a guideline, and not all questions were answered.

In summary, in exploring methodologies for my study, I wanted a method that was inclusive and in line with my core values and beliefs. This meant that conversing with fellow documentarians was essential; my study needed to include the voice of other documentarians, besides mine. I also acknowledge that I am making meaning from the stories shared with me during the interview process, and the stories shared with me are rooted in lived experience – their stories have the power to shift ways of thinking. When including their stories in my study, it allowed me to weave their narratives within *Chapter Five (5): Outward Findings* of this dissertation, shared with my observations and opinions. Several themes emerged from their narratives, and some unexpected revelations from my self-reflection – an important mix of diverse understandings that reflect our diverse social and cultural locations. I also shared the
reasons why *MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit* is significant to the documentary practice. I explained that my study is relevant to Indigenous documentarians and those from outside our communities who wish to engage with our stories and communities. We also discussed the many accounts of identity theft and outsiders coming into our communities and taking stories; therefore, this research focuses on the importance of declaring our relationship to Indigenous story.

This section outlined my epistemology, *MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit* as a methodological approach and pedagogical tool that guides this research by exploring how Indigenous documentary methods demonstrated how our approaches to story embody Indigenous values, and principles that ensure that reciprocity, accountability, and respect. I outlined the methodology that guided my research and included how I have come to my findings, describing both my outward and inward process. Also, I explained the use of interviews to gather data in regard to my inward and outward process, participants, and an analysis of selected documentaries by the participants involved. Also, I reintroduced my research questions, as well I introduced the five (5) documentarians involved in this study discussing the methods of analysis, and how I went about my self-study research process through a narrative inquiry.

### 4.4 Analysis

In this section *Analysis*, I will provide an overview of two analysis methods, the *Outward* and *Inward* processes involved in the data collection over the course of my studies. The first section outlines the *Outward* process and the second discusses my *Inward process of analysis*. Also, I briefly discuss how Indigenous methodologies and documentary methods intersect, contextualizing my participants’ approach to documentary, which assisted with my analysis. I will provide an overview of two analysis methods, the *Outward* and *Inward* processes involved
in the data collection over the course of my studies. It is sectioned into two parts. The first part outlines the *Outward* process and the second discusses my *Inward process* of analysis. I discuss contextualizing my participants approach to documentary, and how it assisted with my analysis, and relates to my framework of *MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit*.

4.4.1 Outward Process Analysis

My strategy for analyzing the data from the *Outward* method needed to shape and present the narratives in a way that both respectfully presented the subjects’ distinct viewpoints and concentrated on the research questions and the central areas of inquiry. In my process of analysis and exploring meaning, I engaged with themes emerging from the interviews, and I also listened to the recordings of interviews several times to be reminded of their recorded voices and nuances. I read their transcripts repeatedly to be sure I understood the meanings I was deriving from our conversations. The printed transcripts provided an opportunity for me to experience their words on a page and give greater reflection on their narratives. As outlined in Chapter 3, the documentarians participating in the study were asked a range of question, which I organized into seven parts: (1) Positionality; (2) Documentary Modality; (3) Cultural Methodology; (4) Themes; (5) (de) Colonialism; (6) Pre-Settler Identity, and lastly, (7) Accountability and Responsibility.

After carefully examining the transcripts (5) five prevalent themes emerged: (1) *Land as Inspiration*, (2) *Trauma and Healing*, (3) *Indigenous Stories*, (4) *Truth*, and lastly, (5) *Accountability and Responsibility*. These themes linked all five of the interviews and allowed me to further explore my research question: *How does our positionality as Indigenous documentarians shape our creativity, and the concepts, themes, and forms explored in documentary?*
Following the interview phase of this study, I transcribed the interview, then organized the core themes from the transcripts and pieced them together which presented a clear frame and course of action moving forward. I was mindful of researcher bias but focused my attention on highlighting responses that prioritized my research question. When I initially reached out to the participants, my hope was to delve deeper into how their identities as Indigenous documentarians inform their practice. Also, I was interested in how Indigenous documentarians differ in approach from one another and how we are contributing to the field of documentary.

Once the analysis of the semi-structured interviews was complete, data from the interviews provided a comprehensive collective overview of the four phases of my research. My methods, both the Inward and Outward processes summarized in the previous section, in conjunction with these other data sources, facilitated the unfolding of the collective narrative I have gathered to date. My research goals are to provide a comprehensive analysis of Indigenous media literature sources relating to our practice and our positionality, and to analyze the functional creative process. The interview questions were formatted based on topics that were relatable to my thesis focus, and prior to asking questions of my colleagues; as part of my protocol, I formally introduced myself and shared my research goals.

More so, once all the interviews were completed, I reviewed the responses and came to understand that Indigenous identity can be challenging for some. Every person has a different narrative about how they identify as Indigenous. I did not wish to engage with identity politics, but it is important to note that there was a range of social locations and understandings of Indigenous identity, which includes a spectrum of definitions. For the subject of Indigenous epistemologies, I felt it important to follow protocol, where we are expected to introduce our own personal narrative prior to sharing. Their responses became data sources to help me
understand their positionality in response to my research question. The themes based on the participant’s responses helped shape the findings. The semi-structured interviews were aimed at having participants share their opinions and perspectives. However, we were able to delve deeper in several topics and prompted questions about Indigenous methodologies and approaches to story. All five interviews were conducted individually, and prior to the interviews there were informal conversations regarding my research framework, questions, and goals. Furthermore, my analysis involved aligning excerpts from the interview responses with inquiry, as outlined previously. My goal was to elicit discourse about positionality and then analyze this discourse within the framework of my research.

4.4.2 Inward Process Analysis

In developing a strategy to analyze the data from my self-reflexive process, I was aware that I would have to shape and present my own work, and its relevance to Indigenous documentary as a whole. I was also aware of my identity as the researcher and as an InNiNew IsKwew played a role in how I interpret my own selected documentary works. Shaping my own narrative as it relates to my research framework and now my pedagogical model MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit allowed me to remain true to my overall intent of this dissertation: to explore how positionality correlates to Indigenous storytelling. I also understand the importance of being open to outsider critiques of the work I do.

Similar to the interview questions I posed to my colleagues, my inward process analysis also included reflections of my interview questions where I am bringing the study of self, while at the same time allowing my self reflection to move beyond my own understanding, but more so around positioning myself in the research process. Also, during my research process, I kept a
journal, which includes my personal responses that I experienced while engaging with other participants, secondary literature, and their documentary work.

4.5 Conclusion

In summary, this section provided an overview of two analysis methods: The Outward and Inward processes involved in the data collection over the course of my studies. I outlined the Outward process and discussed my Inward process of analysis. I have come to the conclusion that there is no single narrative when it comes to Indigenous documentary practices, but that there is an intersection between Indigenous research methodologies, and documentary methods and both include working with collective stories.

In the following chapter, I present the outward findings from participant responses to the interview questions and the film review phase of the research. I also discuss locating (5) five prevailing themes linking the interviews, an analysis of secondary literature, which is weaved within the interview responses, as well as a review of selected documentary works by the participants. The following chapter discusses the Inward Process findings, which include my self-reflexive analysis of (5) five of my documentary works, while examining the overarching themes that emerged from the interviews and the methods and sources of data collection employed.
Chapter 5: Outward Findings

In this poem, *Nights of Seeing* (Koostachin, 2018) from my book of poetry *Unearthing Secrets, Gathering Truths*, I am writing about my haunting and terrifying childhood living with ghosts. The poem speaks to my ability unveil the blanket between the land of the living and the dead. Over the years, I have come to accept my gift and understand that it is an important sight to carry. I have learned to live with the sight I was gifted with.

**Poem 5  Nights of Seeing**

voices loud
screaming at me
war
nights of seeing those who wander

whispers from the darkness
weight on my chest
pressing hard
sleeping torn

waking in a fury
sun shines through my window
gasp in relief

This chapter presents the outward findings from participant responses to the interview and documentary review phase of the research. The purpose of this study was to explore how Indigeneity relates to Indigenous story. As noted earlier, five prevalent themes emerged and these linked the five interviews, which allowed me to further explore my research question and the sub-questions:

*How does our positionality as Indigenous documentarians shape our creativity, and the concepts, themes, and forms explored in documentary?*
Sub-Questions:

1. *How does documentary deriving from Indigenous lived experience serve as a catalyst for colonial system change within Indigenous community and western mainstream media?*

2. *How will narratives produced by Indigenous documentarians reflect our positionality, roles, responsibilities, and methodologies?*

3. *How does our documentary work confront the colonial gaze?*

4. *How does unearthing our pre-settler truth – stories - reveal and strengthen our ties to our past, present and the future?*

To examine these questions, I invited participants to reflect on the questions and as previously stated, the questions prompted me to identify five emerging themes from the transcripts, and they inspired the participants to examine how they might further integrate Indigenous epistemologies into their documentary practice.

Data sources for these findings come from the interview transcripts. Findings are also informed by my notes and observations, and on occasion by the participant’s backgrounds working in the field of documentary. As outlined previously, when I reviewed the transcripts, I looked for core themes that resonated with my research. By categorizing the documentarian’s responses in accordance with (5) five core themes, I was able to present and weave my ideas and personal reflections throughout this section of the chapter. I also accounted for ideas that were inspired by their narratives, and the insights they carry as they relate to the practice of documentary. The analysis process allowed me to make connection between my self-reflexive analysis described in the following chapter, and the emerging themes from the participant’s
responses. Additionally, this chapter will include a discussion of rationale that resulted in the emerging themes.

The semi-structured interviews with participants were guided by questions, which were provided to participants beforehand. For the first section of questions, Positionality, I first asked the documentarians in this study to identify themselves in terms of their cultural identity (having first confirmed that they were comfortable doing so). The second section of questions spoke to Documentary Modality, in terms of the documentary platforms they engage with. The third section of questions were regarding Cultural Methodology, in terms of how the participants approach storytelling based on their own cultural identity. The fourth section of questions discussed the Themes they explore in their practice. The fifth section was about Colonialism and how their stories are influenced by colonialism or not. The sixth section of questions was about Pre-settler Identity in terms of their connection to the stories prior to the arrival of settlers on these lands. And the final section of questions was about Responsibility and Accountability and how they ensure they are holding themselves as documentarians responsible and accountable to the story and to the community.

The questions sparked meaningful dialogue regarding our own practice, and through conversation we delved deeper into our own documentary approaches and methodology. The questions were meant as a guideline, and not all questions were answered. The participants differ in experience, identity, and documentary platforms and they have worked in the industry in different capacities. The participants involved in this study range in ages from mid-thirties to sixties and included (4) four self-identified cis females and (1) one cis male.
5.1 Emerging Themes

Following the completion of my comprehensive exams in 2017, the semi-structured interviews were scheduled with the participants. The group of participants is culturally diverse in terms of their Indigenous identities, and artistic expression, but despite these differences, I was able to identify the following (5) five themes linking their responses, as seen in the table below:

Table 5.1 Emerging Themes highlights five themes that surfaced from the interview process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EMERGING THEMES</th>
<th>Dana Claxton</th>
<th>Amanda Strong</th>
<th>Tracey German</th>
<th>Dorothy Christian</th>
<th>Gregory Coyes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Theme #1 Land as Inspiration | • Land is our teacher;  
  • Land holds space for learning & practice of culture;  
  • Land inspires storytellers | • Finding identity, language & meaning of sexuality from the land;  
  • Many are disconnected from land | • Land holds important stories;  
  • Land is our Ancestors speaking to us | • Land has stories to tell | • Land is nature;  
  • Our personal connection to the land is what inspires our stories |
| Theme #2 Trauma & Healing | • Still healing from the Murder & Rape of Indigenous Women;  
  • We are in a state of healing as a people | • Our stories can be told without words;  
  • English is limiting in telling stories | • There is a need to incorporate feminist perspective in our healing practices/stories;  
  • Healing from the Residential School system | • To achieve cultural healing, we need to understand what is underneath our stories;  
  • There’s a dislocation from the land | • We are still decolonizing from religion & the impact of Residential Schools |
| Theme #3 Indigenous Stories | • Stories belong to land;  
  • The responsibility to the stories is with the people;  
  • Stories inform our personal cultural practice | • Our stories are poetic, visual & sonic soundscapes;  
  • Our stories can be told without words;  
  • Our stories are like seeds;  
  • We can use media to show and tell something that is other-worldly | • Some have lost connection to the land & our stories  
  • We are diverse;  
  • There’s a cyclical nature of Storytelling | • Stories are community;  
  • There is a cultural congruence;  
  • Each region is different in regard to our stories | • Stories as a community resource |
| Theme #4 Truth | • Truth is fluidity of cultural practice;  
  • Spiritual & art Practice;  
  • Truth is being one with our languages and ways of being | • Language is always evolving;  
  • Truth is living;  
  • Language is cyclical, organic & non-linear; | • Truth is finding purpose in the meaning in our arts practice;  
  • Learning from Elders; Sacred rituals;  
  • The act of protecting our stories;  
  • Knowledge is fluid;  
  • We carry a quilt of stories | • Truth is learning about ceremony, fasting, & spiritual practice through our language | • There is a gender fluidity in the language  
  • Truth is being open to story |
My strategy with the interview data focused on locating themes that connected five (5) themes to the interview questions, which included focusing on content.

I identified the following:

1) Statements that related to my research questions;

2) Statements that addressed positionality;

3) Statements that connected scholarly literature and theoretical perspectives in relation to documentary theory;

4) Observations of emerging themes

After analyzing the transcripts, I categorized the findings into the five themes as indicated. The thematic lens approach to this section allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the findings.

The following section presents the findings in a narrative format and the summary of the interviews is sectioned by the five emerging themes: (1) *Land as Inspiration*, (2) *Trauma and Healing*, (3) *Indigenous Stories*, (4) *Truth*, and lastly, (5) *Responsibility and Accountability*. By categorizing participant responses in accordance with themes, findings also come from my reflections and ideas that surfaced during and after the interview process. In surveying the data, the first *Land as Inspiration* resonated with all the participants.
5.1.1 Land as Inspiration

In this first finding, the concept of *Land as Inspiration*, all five participants stressed that the land holds space for learning and inspires documentarians of all kinds. They shared that the land carries significant cultural stories, and it is through our connection to the land that our Ancestors communicate with us. All participants agreed that the land is our teacher and holds space for our learning as human beings. The land inspires creativity and story; documentarians need to honour *their* gifts.

My first interview was with Dana Claxton in her University of British Columbia studio, and it became evident immediately that she has a strong sense of self and that her identity as a Lakota Sioux woman is her creative force. Claxton shared with me that the connection to her Ancestral land inspires her arts practice. Her work has screened at esteemed international film festivals and has been exhibited at prestigious art world venues. Based on my research, much of her earlier work has been recognized for its disruption of imagery, entwined with cultural belongings. In a review of Claxton’s Vancouver Art Gallery exhibit *Fringing the Cube*, Claxton’s themes are entwined in Cultural Belongings. Exhibited from October 27, 2018 to February 3, 2019, *Fringing the Cube* is an assertion of Indigenous claim to an institutional space – “white” signifying more than the colour of the walls (Laurence, par. 2, 2019). Claxton’s media work is deeply grounded in Indigenous experience and the belief that the dream world is the real world. “Through photographs and videos evoking Lakota beliefs and ceremonialism, she creates art of inspiration and affirmation, a kind of formal and thematic counterpoint to criticism and admonishment” (Laurence, 2019, para. 9). In my opinion, one of her most significant video works *Rattle*, a four-channel video, invites audiences into her world of visual and aural rhythms. Claxton describes this piece as a visual prayer, and she tells me that much of her experimental
work originates from the dream world, and she considers the land and the sky as her early teachers. Claxton expands on the intersection of land, dream, and sky, she states:

The Lakota believe that the dream world is the real world. A lot of my work, especially my more experimental work, and some of my photo-based work is from the dream world. I get those things from the dream world. I am thinking, in terms of regionally - I am thinking about the land, the land in Saskatchewan and the sky have been very early teachers for me of storytelling. (Claxton, D., personal communication, November 2, 2017)

In contrast, Tracey German speaks about a time when she was deeply influenced by going back to the land later in life, and how story is informed by our relationship to the land, which we are tied to by spiritual connection. “My films are inspired by my family history and my own personal story,” said German during our interview in her Toronto home. German carries 20 plus years of production experience and during this time she has produced award winning dramatic, documentary and experimental films. German shares of her early influences and the importance of knowing your own story first, she says:

I was informed by Indigenous teachings first. My teachers were all about auto-photography or turning the camera onto yourself to tell your own story first… to understand your own story first before you begin to turn it onto other people. (German, T., personal communication, December 3, 2017)

“[German] conceived of the show while filming an activist video around conservation effort. There, she came into contact with an archaeologist working with a chief who pointed out that there was no national repository or record of all findings” (Laurence, 2016, para. 6). German’s tells her that her desire to learn more about her Indigenous history and provide insight into the
realities of Indigenous peoples are inspired by her connection to her Indigenous identity. German shares that she finds a connection to her identity through her work, such as her APTN series *Wild Archaeology* (2016) and the documentary films *Iggstock* (2011), about young Canadians growing their own music festival, and *Restless Spirit* (2005), about the rodeo circuit. Through her creative work it is evident that exploring identity is also necessary for understanding the self in relation to the world, and in this case German’s connection to her Ancestral lands. She goes on to tell me that it is through the sharing of story, we are strong in our resistance. In my conversation with German, she was generous in telling of her personal experience of reconnecting to her identity through her storytelling practice.

During an interview in a downtown Vancouver studio, Amanda Strong shares that she did not grow up on reserve and explains of her experience of tracing back her lineage. Strong’s work is focused on her family history. She states that gathering stories is the work of all storytellers, and it is no different than the work we do as documentarians. She tells me that in revisiting her lineage, or in the act of seeking connection to place, she produces new stories. Our conversation confirms that Indigenous documentarians are continually interpreting, portraying, and recasting Indigenous their/his/herstories and knowledge teachings. Through documentary like the work of the participants involved in this study, we are gathering knowledge along pathways of family bloodlines, community their/his/herstories, and across generations. Strong goes on to share that she does not have a connection to a specific land base because both sets of her grandparents have passed on, Strong says:

> I did not come from a reserve. I did not come from a territory or land and that is why I don’t have the connection to the land that I would like. I struggle with it because I wonder where I fit in all of this. I wonder what am I doing wrong by contributing
...into this whole urban thing. So, is it enough just doing the stories that I’m doing?

(Strong, A., personal communication, December 18, 2017)

Dr. Dorothy Christian a Cucw-la7 is a visual storyteller, scholar, writer, and editor from the Splatsin community of Secwepemc Nation, she explains to me that she honours her Syilx ancestry. In an interview in her Vancouver home, while not going into detail about her film and television career, she shares that her background includes producing, directing, and writing for the national broadcaster Vision TV, where she accumulated over a 100 production credits.

Christian discusses how our identity as Indigenous people is informed by the land, and by our own stories and our Ancestors stories. She tells me that our cultural protocols are informed by the land we are born to: “In my PhD, I talk about land, story and Cultural Protocols… these come from the lands that we are born to. Every Indigenous culture in this Nation has stories that tell them how they came to be on the land, and that they were born to” (Christian, D., personal communication, December 8, 2017).

In my conversation with Christian, she reminds me that orality of place determines how and when we can share collectively cared-for stories. In her doctoral dissertation, Christian discusses how land is crucial in her own research regarding Indigenous media. She writes “Land is a critical aspect of this work because it is integral to our land/place based cultural stories; therefore, land and story are intertwined” (Christian, 2017, p. 18). She explains that the land on which we live has a story, and a story talks to the people of that place. There is sacredness rooted in the land of our Ancestors, and she, among others, have worked hard to ensure that protocol is followed when working with Indigenous story. Christian stresses that it is up to Indigenous documentarians to uphold cultural protocol and honour the land where are stories are born, as it is our responsibility.
In my interview at the University of British Columbia with Gregory Coyes of Good Medicine Media, he shares that he is the creator of *Slow Media*, and he has several television and film credits to his name, such as television series *Stories from the Seventh Fire, Live from the Hundred Years Café,* and *The Mix.* In our conversation, he shares his experience about his connection to land, which was informed by living on a Metis farm that has been in his family for years. Coyes briefly discusses the impact of the church on his family, but then immediately talks about how our stories as Indigenous peoples come from the land, the land is our teacher. Coyes says:

> We converted early, there were certainly tremendous losses, which were at that early adoption of Catholicism, but one of the huge gifts was this land - My brother, two cousins and uncle still live on that land. To me, our stories are deeply ingrained in what is Canada, even though they don’t know it, because it doesn't just come from the land, it comes from the environment, and that is cultural survival. (Coyes, G., personal communications, January 19, 2018)

Coyes speaks to the impact of the church on community and the importance of cultural survivance in relation to the storytelling practice. From our conversation, it is evident in Coyes practice that there is a connecting between the stories and the land. He explains that cultural survivance is achieved through the act of unearthing and remembering – our Ancestral stories still live on the land.

In summary, in reflecting on the theme of *Land as Inspiration,* participants agree that we, as Indigenous people are born into culture and community, either in birth or returning to Ancestral lands. The idea of *Land as Inspiration* carried a lot of deep significance for the participants. Some shared stories of having a strong connection to place, while others spoke to
the importance of reconnecting to place. The participants stress that their practice is inspired by their relationship to the land. The relationship with the land informs language, and how we live our lives, as well as the relationships we have with each other. Participants expressed that their work as documentarians is inspired through their relationship with the land, and they carry a deep understanding of their responsibility to honour their source of story. We all agree, storytelling is inspired by our relationship to the land, it is interconnected.

5.1.2 Trauma and Healing

The second emerging theme was Trauma and Healing and all participants involved in the study agreed that we are in a continued state of healing. Underlying participant’s stories was the need to understand trauma and healing as it pertains to our lives as Indigenous peoples. They share that we have been decolonizing the influences of religion and the impact of residential schools since the arrival of the settlers to these lands. The interviews with the participants make it evident that our tradition and cultural connections inform our work as documentarians and standing firm in our identity means cultural healing and wellness. Claxton asserts that our cultural knowledge plays a central role in our storytelling practices. She goes on to tell me that our knowledge systems are highly complex and dynamic. They are based in intellectual pedagogical systems, which inform people about how to relate to each other, and how live on the land in balance. Stressing the importance of our traditional practices and ceremony, both tied to healing. Claxton discusses the significance of living our culture:

We had ceremonial life – feasting, naming ceremonies, puberty ceremonies, the making of relatives, and those things still happen, and they have to continue to happen. Culture thrives on a reserve, and that’s where it’s thriving. That is where all the systems of
knowledge and all those cultural protocols, and roles happen— it’s on the land for one, with the people. (Claxton, D., personal communication, November 2, 2017)

Claxton spoke to the significance of community in relation to healing, specifically the reservation where ceremony continues to this day. She shares that community members still participate in cultural practices and for the most part, still speak Indigenous languages. The cultural practices and the languages of this place are informed by the land and support us in finding balance.

Not unlike Claxton, German discusses the importance of acknowledging our trauma to heal. She tells me that the stories told from an Indigenous perspective shows the vastness of our diversity as Indigenous people. She stresses that we need to work collectively to achieve community wellness. German goes on to say that although we have incredible diversity within our communities, we are still connected. These collective experience carries a wealth of knowledge and story— good stories — which she describes as our best weapon against trauma, and our pathway to healing. German speaks to the diversity and the strength of Indigenous stories, and healing begins with acknowledging our differences. She shares, “Acknowledging that not all peoples were peaceful with one another, but now we have to work as a collective in order to be visible, because the history has been threated.” (German, T., personal communication, December 3, 2017)

Similar to German, Strong also speaks to the need to heal from the colonial past in order to grow strong as a people. She shares that stories provide us the healing we need to move forward in our lives and constitute a history of our people. Strong asserts that story carries the power to change perspectives and more; it connects us to each other and to place, therefore protocol must be integrated in the storytelling process. Strong’s awareness of the importance of
following protocol is evident in her work because of the way she incorporates Indigenous knowledge systems. Throughout the interview process, Strong speaks to the significance of positionality, acknowledging the roots of the stories being told. She shares, “We need ways for people now to heal and grow. My job is to tell the story” (Strong, A., personal communication, December 18, 2017). Based on our conversation, there is a sense of obligation to share Indigenous story with respect and dignity, and there is an expectation to refer back to the community and/or Elders to ensure we stay true to the spirit of the story. Indeed, we are in a continued state of healing, but it is through sharing story that we can understand how trauma has impacted our communities.

Christian shares a story about working with non-Native crew on set. She tells me that there was a lot educating on her part, and this particular shoot she spoke of entailed ceremony. She stresses that abiding by cultural protocols while filming equates to healing and building trust in community. Christian discusses that the respect for Indigenous story is of upmost importance and an honourable approach is necessary to achieve balance. Providing her crew with the cultural protocols and education about the Indigenous people they were filming was her way of creating change in the field, and challenging the wrongs of the past. In shifting the perspectives of her non-Indigenous counterparts by educating her crew on the community’s expectation, Christian was ensuring the safety and wellbeing of her relations.

Coyes also discusses the significance of healing by honouring cultural stories and speaks to his experience working with Elders and Knowledge Keepers. He goes on to explain that reciprocity is based on the notion of giving back in a way that benefits the individual or the community. Healing is achieved by revitalizing community stories and a means to self-determination. Coyes shares his experience of how he has adopted traditional practices in his
storytelling process, and how this approach to story has healed community. Based on our conversation, I have come to conclude that we as Indigenous people are healing from colonialism with story. He tells me that following cultural practices mitigated a spiritual wakening in his work, Coyes says:

> While I did not grow up in a strongly traditional family I certainly knew about some traditional practice and those kinds of experiences early on in my career and also adopting a spiritual way, rejecting Catholicism and adopting an Indigenous spiritual path really informed me about how to deal with story, how to approach story – that exchange: you come with a gift. I would never come without a gift and to honour those stories in a Traditional way. (Coyes, G., personal communication, January 19, 2018)

In summary, the theme of trauma and healing emerged in the interviews with participants, and even though their experiences differed, they expressed that healing is attainable through the act of sharing our stories. There is power in story: it carries agency and has the capacity to shift perspective, either that be within us or in a larger context. They also touched on the importance of authorship, protocols and building relationships, in relation to healing from colonial traumas. All participants stress the value in creating a platform for Indigenous voice, and it is through our diverse systems of knowledge that we achieve community wellness. New stories will emerge, and through sharing our personal stories of survivance we are reminded of our resiliency.

5.1.3 Indigenous Stories

Another emerging area was *Indigenous stories*. All participants discussed that the responsibility for our stories lies with our own people and they stressed that our stories belong to the land. Based on my interviews with the participants, they understand that story-based methods, and in the case of the body of work by participants are beneficial strategies, and it
allows them to explore story on their own terms. German is most known for her award winning APTN television series *Wild Archeology*, which works to illustrate the connection between archeology and orality. She strives to demonstrate that there are geographical differences across these lands and every episode provides insight into the diversity of Indigenous people. In our conversation, we had a moment of clarity, we both understood the significant correlations between my research framework *MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit* and her series. She went on to speak to the importance of respecting our responsibility to cultural stories, and how story carries a life of its own. German says:

> Well, that is what the whole point of *Wild Archeology* is – it is that *Unearthing*. Literally, the archeological record is *unearthing* or going under water and it is about the land, and the spirit of the land. Those are the first peoples that inhabited the land, and then all the layers on top of that… each consecutive transformation of knowledge. Knowledge is fluid and growing. It is changing and moving. Language is moving and the ways of doing change over time… It is so deep and so rich. (German, T., personal communication, December 3, 2017)

When speaking to German I was intrigued by our similar beliefs regarding the act of *unearthing* as a methodology and pedagogical tool for documentarians. Indeed, there was consensus among participants that there is a deep respect for the roots of our stories, and how there must be a plan of care when we decide to present our story to the world. German goes on to say that the stakes are high for Indigenous documentarians, and we must always consider the sacred otherwise we lose sight of what is important. She discusses that when working with Indigenous story we are bringing in methodologies from the past, and we are using a new tool to implement them – the camera. We agree that it is our duty to sit with people in our community and share experiences.
Being the author of our own stories means that our respective communities often hold us accountable.

Claxton reminded me that our creation stories describe the shaping of the world in which we live and breathe. There are many worldviews of Indigenous story, and our spirituality is an embodiment of life – there are no promises in relation to where our spirits will travel to after leaving this realm. Claxton shares:

Everything you need to know is in the sky. That big sky in Saskatchewan, and growing up as a child, it just did something to me. The sky was my screen -- that was my first screen -- the sky, and everything you see in that sky and all of those stories the clouds can tell us, and all of our teachings. (Claxton, D., personal communication, November 2, 2017)

It became evident to me that despite differing views about spirituality, their stories circled back to times when they remember understanding what spirituality meant to them, and for the most part, the realization came to them when they were engaging with community story – their stories were personal and meaningful.

During our conversation, Claxton speaks to the significance of the sky and how its teachings influenced not only her arts practice, but also her life as a Lakota woman. It was an incredible revelation. Claxton also speaks in depth about her recent production The Sioux Project (2018) and how it is connected to her spirituality. She uses varied approaches and strategies in her media work, and her work brings to light the significance of creating a pathway to awareness through story. We discussed how documentary in all its varied modalities, is a way to celebrate the collective, as well as the individual. Claxton’s media work challenges colonialism and asserts herself as an Indigenous woman who is creating space for Indigenous story. She tells me of the
importance of decolonizing through our arts practices, and that there is a need for methods so we
can further deconstruct power dynamics. Claxton says:

   It shows a vibrant living culture that’s intelligent -- that’s thoughtful, but spiritual.
   That’s deeply spiritual and with *The Sioux Project* that came across completely, and
people who were making their regalia, or their star-quilts, or their cultural belongings --
it’s all based on the relationship to spirit. I think that becomes very clear. Cultures
maintain themselves, and this was another thing that I was so grateful for. We need to
maintain culture, and cultures are maintained through Pow Wow. Cultures are
maintained through our regalia. Cultures are maintained through song and dance and
language. The Sioux project was challenging any construct of the stereotype. (Claxton,
D., personal communication, November 2, 2017)

I concur; Indigenous story is a web of our past, present and our future selves and it is the root of
our identity as Indigenous people. We later discussed orality is communicated through our
identity, and in our day to day lives, and these stories form the fabric of our daily lives.

   Strong discusses her creative process when working with Indigenous story, and how her
storytelling practice centres on the core of the story. She tells me that this is the case with her
stop-motion film *Indigo* (2014), about an elderly woman struggling with the war, and her stop-
motion documentary *Four Faces of the Moon* (2016), about time travelling to bear witness to the
mass slaughter of the bison.

   Each of these films represents an engagement with Indigenous futurism in ways that
address the fluidity of Indigenous ideas of time, so that the past flows into the present and
future, while digitally suturing generations of Strong’s relatives together across time and
space in a way that simply would not be possible in a live action film. (Dowell 2018 p. 197).

We agree that as documentarian, when we approach story, the story carries life within it, and we need to respect the gifts it holds and that is why there are protocols in place to protect the stories and our knowledge systems.

In a way, Strong has time travelled through her art practice, placing herself in the past with her stories creating new memories. Strong also speaks to cultural protocols and the significance of building relationships and relationality: “The core of how I work is around respect for the story, whether that’s coming from me, partly from me, or from another author, writer or storyteller -- that can’t be messed with. I always make sure that I have permission, and constantly checking in” (Strong, A., personal communication, December 18, 2017). Storytelling is a powerful component of our lives as documentarians and should be respected as a way of exploring our cultural understandings of the world and our collective values and beliefs. In Strong’s *Four Faces of the Moon*, “At several points in the film her ancestors demonstrate teachings of respect for the land through ceremony and protocol” (Dowell 2018 p. 197). Strong asserts that there is unification in sharing Indigenous story.

Although Christian never provided me with details regarding her work in film and television, we discussed in length how Indigeneity played a role in her arts practice. She tells me that she has worked to bring Indigenous stories to the Canadian screen. Christian has an insider’s perspective about Indigenous storytelling in all its platforms. She shares that our stories allow us to remember through the act of story creation, and first and foremost promoting Indigenous voices and ideologies. Christian, an advocate for our Indigenous voices in media, encourages us to create our own criteria. Christian says:
What if the Indigenous people had a camera, and it was looking at them; what would the camera say then? So, positionality is critical, and I think we are still making our own criteria. Our experts are the Elders, and the old people who knew all these things, those who carry our Indigenous knowledge -- whether it was about the water, the food, the political situation, or this or that… Those are our experts (Christian, D., personal communication, December 8, 2017).

During my conversation with Christian, it became clear to me that remembering becomes crucial in healing the past traumas, and when we allow for Indigenous story to live within us, it is a way to celebrate the adversity we have survived as a people. It is also a means to sustain our cultural story, whether it be painful or triumphant. Our stories stand as a testimony to our resiliency, strength, and wisdom.

In summary, discussing Indigenous Story opened many doorways to understanding our connection to each other as documentarians. Strong describes the cyclical nature of Indigenous storytelling and Coyes suggests that our stories are a community resource, and collectively care for. German spoke to importance of identity, and reconnecting to the land. Claxton and Christian spoke to the fluidity of our cultural practices and the importance of spirituality, which as we discussed can be understood as multidimensional body of understanding rooted in a belief system. It also includes the notion of interconnectedness between the living and the universe, and transcends time and space, as we understand it to be. We all agreed that as documentarians, we have a responsibility to the story and to the community. Stories offer a connection to the past and share how to live our lives.
5.1.4 Truth

*Truth*, another emerging theme surfaced, and interestingly most our discussions seemed to lead us back to Indigenous languages, which are understood as a medium through which knowledge is transmitted across time and space. We acknowledged that colonial languages are increasingly dominant in our communities, but we shared our sentiments that orality reflects our ethos. Orality, truth, and storytelling are interconnected and highly valued as sources of knowledge, that for thousands of years have conveyed our values, principles and belief systems to adjacent generation.

During our conversations, we all agreed that our Indigenous languages carry our *Truth*, and truth can also be found in our cultural ways of being. Coyes shares his experience regarding the strong and powerful connection between Indigenous storytelling and the spirit realm. He also speaks to me about the importance of sustaining cultural integrity, which is in our language and in the characters of our stories. He discusses the notion of truth in his storytelling practice, and how an opportunity to sit with the legendary self-taught artist Norval Morrisseau (1932-2007), Anishnaabe from Bingwi Neyaashi Anishinaabek First Nation, was an important influence on his life as a storyteller. Coyes known for the powerful animated series *Stories from the Seventh Fire: Four Stories Told for Four Seasons* (2002) with Storytellers Production Inc. Coyes tells me that Morrisseau designed the Wesakechak legend segments of the series and how honoured he was to work with legendary Morrisseau. He was known as an individual who lived in two worlds, the world of the living and the spirit realm. Coyes explains that Morrisseau spoke his truth through his arts practice, and his powerful paintings reflected his healing spirit. Coyes shares:

> Get this, after our first meeting I brought him a gift and presented him with the script.

> As I was leaving, he said *I’ve been waiting ten years for you to come*. He was a trickster
himself and they do ravel in those different realms, and if you look at his paintings it’s a reflection of that” (Coyes, G., personal communication, January 19, 2018).

When Coyes shared this story with me, I thought to myself that he was gifted an opportunity of a lifetime to work with someone who understood the strength and wisdom of the spirit realm. He goes on to share that to have someone like Morrisseau, who paints of other spiritual dimensions, tell you he has been waiting for you was an incredible honour. I concur, to have an opportunity to share space with one of our legends is life altering.

Our conversation highlighted how truth is subjective and story in all its forms, has the power to transform the storyteller and the viewers/listeners. Our discussion led me to the realization that truth telling is a storytelling methodology which allows the storyteller to draw connections to the land, living story, and cultural ways of being. Our truth is experienced in our language, relationships, art, creativity, spirituality, and through our story. Indigenous documentary as a storytelling platform is the best tool because the camera observes and allows the viewer/listener to engage and learn. Our stories, our truths continue to breathe hope, love and PoWaMeWin into our communities.

Similar to Coyes, Claxton discusses how culture informs her life choices, and how looking back in time can support and influence the decisions of today. She explains how familial or community stories and truth support us as documentarians in making connections with our Ancestral their/his/herstories. She asserts that documentary provides the platform for us to remember our cultural roots and also, to support us in connecting to ourselves. Claxton says:

Culture informs how you live in life. Growing up with a Lakota mother is that. Her first language was Lakota, and it’s beautiful – the whole relationship to the universe. She was just this little Lakota woman, a mixed-blood, and she was very wise. So those
teachings were sort of cardinal teachings of Lakota philosophy of life. Culture saves – I truly believe that and if you just think about how your relatives lived, and it’s always with a good heart, and honourable. (Claxton, D., November 2, 2017)

Claxton discusses that Indigenous documentary is informed by our culture, and to our connection to community and to place, and through this medium we can hear voices, see the faces, listen to the stories being shared, and learn about other perspectives. When we share, we are making connections and it is a form of orality.

German discusses how orality is rooted in Indigenous research, and the part protocols play in her practice. There is a lot at stake when producing your own television series, which also came up in my conversation with Coyes when we spoke to his practice. German explains our relationships in this industry are key; especially with the overwhelming pressures, we need our colleagues to pull us through. German also speaks to relationality and truth, and how building relationships is an important facet of the storytelling process, finding our truth, and building relationships within community. German shares:

Oral history is embedded in the research we do. So, we begin with research, and making contacts in communities, and oral stories or oral history we treat as fact, or as history, and incorporate those stories within the archaeological story that we are telling. The science is a way to understand things, and then the oral history has another way to understand. Each community has a different language group as well, and the way that they communicate stories, where Mnemonic association figure heavily into the way stories are remembered in the landscape. (German, T., personal communication, December 3, 2017)
German goes on to discuss how her APTN television series *Wild Archaeology* is embedded in Indigenous language – first series in the world in the Dakota language – and how we need to work collectively despite our differences. Truth lives in the old languages and it lives in the words we chose to use today. German says, “These are Indigenous stories being told by Indigenous peoples from different nations, within a vast territory, that we are not all the same. We have to work as a collective in order to be visible, because the history has been threatened” (German, T., personal communication, December 3, 2017). Documentaries are a platform for sharing our lived experiences, values and beliefs with a wider audience, and through our sharing of truth, we create networks.

Strong discusses how orality and stories are informed by place, and also, she shares that there is universal element in regard to Indigenous stories to her work. She explains that there is a personal and a fundamental responsibility to be protect and honour the messaging embedded in story. Truths are revealed from our respective cultures and they deepen our cultural awareness. We also discussed the growing frustration when our stories are labeled as mythology or as *untruths*. She asserts that Indigenous stories are our truths and argues that they are not myths, Strong says:

> Our stories and/or our oral histories are our truth. There are words like myth and legend that I feel like [are] in some ways their definitions are claiming truth. However, I still think they are very loaded, and almost insinuate this very fairy-tale idea. To me, when I hear those words, I think the opposite of truth – so strange how words are. (Strong, A., personal communication, December 18, 2017)

In summary, it became clear through our conversations that we share similar sentiments regarding the storytelling process and sharing our *Truth* permits us to celebrate survival,
revitalization, and the continued act of (re)storying. We are always in a place of protecting of truth for outsiders, therefore we are obligated to honour our collective memory. Our stories carry agency, and they have different purposes, and for the most part, they provide us with Ancestral knowledge. The participants spoke to how stories tell us about our ceremonies, ways of being, and essentially how to live a good life. The stories we tell as documentarians go beyond the story of colonialism, for instance as witnessed in the stories shared through the work of the participants involved in this study. In our conversations, we also discussed that truth carries energy – orality. Indigenous documentarians are the custodians of truth because we are holding each other accountable and being responsible to both the community and to the source of the story.

5.1.5. Accountability and Responsibility

During the interview process, the theme of Accountability and Responsibility was explored in all discussions with participants. In my conversation with Christian, she speaks to the importance of reclaiming our languages and our knowledge systems through our arts practices, and she stresses that there is responsibility that comes with engaging with story. She explains that the knowledge shared with others through documentary can sustain Indigenous worldviews and create opportunities to produce new meanings, therefore the documentarian is accountable to the source of story. Later, we explored how documentary as a storytelling platform allows for complex and interrelated themes to be shared. Christian also shares that documentary invites viewers/listeners to into the documentarian’s world, and through employing an Indigenous methodology, the documentarian ensures they are responsible and accountable. She mentions that one way in which she ensures she is being accountable to the community she is working with, is to spend time building relationships prior to shooting. She speaks to her
experience working with Knowledge Keepers and Elders throughout her career, and how she follows protocol set out by the community, for instance, she either gifts tobacco or offers it to the land. Christian asserts that being responsible and accountable also requires one to decolonize the self and mindfulness. She explains that she has worked with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous crew, and there is always opportunity to learn. Christian says:

We have so many people who are our own people, Indigenous people, who have bought into the colonial story. They have made that victim story work for them. Even though, they might be brown on the outside, on the inside they are thinking like them. Unless we reclaim our own languages, and our own cultural ways, Indigenous ways of knowing, our philosophies, our pedagogies, and our epistemologies – if we do not have that within us, then what do we have?

Decolonization of the self is critical in documentary, and she goes on to share that it also includes enacting and embodying cultural knowledge. Indigenous documentarians play a significant role in sustaining cultural stories by developing innovative ways and means to share story. Christian stresses that the current state of Indigenous cultural stories need to be acknowledged, which includes the story of colonization, and so, as documentarians we are responsible for correcting our understandings we may have internalized, and we need to work to dismantle existing misrepresentations of Indigeneity. Christian, also tells me that the stakes are high for Indigenous documentarians because we will personally feel the consequences of our actions and of our choice:

Cultural identity is everything. To have a dream and to pay attention to the signs that was given to me. To follow a certain path because I am very intuitive – I pay attention to those things. I am a participant in Spiritual Ceremonies – it’s practiced in everything
that I do. So how can I not be informed by my cultural identity and the history that has happened to us - to me individually and to us collectively? (Christian, D., personal communication, December 8, 2017)

Coyes tells me that much of his passion was in documentary, and he started working in documentary in the early 1980s when opportunities were few and far between. The first documentary series he worked on was entitled *My Partners, My People* produced by Gill Cardinal, and he had the chance to work on four of the thirteen episodes. When speaking to working with Indigenous community, he discusses that his process includes spending time with the community before the crew arrives. Coyes also states that it is his responsibility to do his research and understand the community culture before filming. He later discusses his experience working with Morrisseau. He learned that the complexity of our stories often reach far beyond language and Indigenous story may also refer to other realms. He explains that there a deep responsibility when engaging with the place where truth resides – the spirit realm. Coyes shares:

As gatherers of the stories, we are the ones who put those stories on display, for instance, “Stories from the Seventh’s Fire” which was an animation project where a couple of non-Native partners, one of them was very well connected with the Cree. I had the desire with some of the Wesakechak stories, the Cree Trickster Stories. Because I was a young dad, I had recognized the incredible value of these stories. If we are going to personify them, animation is the way because he is a shapeshifter. I went to Norval and realized that this man can personify Wesakechak because he travels on these planes; he has a Shaman who travels on all these planes who actually knows these characters. I am telling this story because it is an example of not just working with one community,
but when you produce, then your work is on display for all of the community. (Coyes, G., personal communication, January 19, 2018)

We later discussed that documentary, and all its diverse platforms works to frame our stories as a collective whole. Indigenous stories are rich, complex, diverse, and culturally based. He reminds me that as documentarians, we need to put our stories first. During my time with the participants, I concluded that documentary has the potential to be a narrative method of storytelling, and in a way, we have been approaching documentary narratively from the beginning, not unlike our Ancestors. It has become increasingly clear after conversations with the participants that to be responsible and accountable, we need to treat stories with the upmost respect. Coyes also speaks to the importance of reciprocity when approaching story and the importance of returning to community with the finished story. Coyes discusses the real test most of us are faced with as documentarians: hearing feedback from the community we have worked with. Coyes says, “To be responsible is really in terms of protocol is to be able to come back to the community with the finished story - that is the test. You want to be able to go back to the community and present them with the story and hear what they have to say about it” (Coyes, G., personal communication, January 19, 2018). He explains that as documentarians, are work entails protecting Indigenous stories, ways of being and languages.

Claxton discusses her experience working with community and how she ensures she is responsible and respectful in her practice. She explains that documentary has different platforms for her to explore storytelling. Documentary is about exploring truth and providing a space for Indigenous voice. She tells me that as an Indigenous documentarian, she feels strong sense of responsibility to the community she is working with. Claxton explains that the stakes are high
because she wants to ensure community members are comfortable and feel that they were represented well. Claxton says:

I wanted them to know what I have been doing and how I work. My whole story – so they would trust me, because I realized that it was a relationship of trust, and that then they were going to let me come work in the community – work with their children, and then make whatever two-hour document and it was a big responsibility. We do not make-work for people to like it, and we hope they like it, and we want to challenge people for whatever variety of reasons, but I have never felt so much responsibility of making a work before as when working with your own community. I wasn’t there as an outsider documentary filmmaker coming in and getting a story, and then leaving and never coming back. But then that’s also why those traditional practices are so important. (Claxton, D., personal communication, November 2, 2017)

During my interview with German, she discusses the importance of being accountable and responsible by following protocol during the all the production phases of her APTN series Wild Archeology. She liaised with community members and built relationship prior to filming. As we speak about our roles and responsibility working in television, German says:

There’s long liaising that happens often between communities, and some more than others. There is a science component and an archaeological component that they also need to buy in to, so there be a lot of different interest groups that need to buy in, and I need to present myself in a way of competency. I do need to present myself as a competent, a presentable person, but always start conversations with who I am. I am a woman with Indigenous heritage that is trying to understand these stories and bring them to a larger public and tell the first stories – like this is the first story that are
foundational. Respect needs to be given and I am honoured that I was able to envision this. To be able to make and have responsibility over this project, at least ten years. I am a practical person and I wanted to make something that could make a difference. (German, T., personal communication, December 3, 2017)

We further discussed how documentary as a method of storytelling is an important strategy for engaging with subject/s or a community. Presenting herself as respectable and honourable were ways to build trust, as well as positioning herself as an Indigenous person. To ensure she is responsible and accountable, she tells me that she asks for feedback – she works within a cooperative model - and works with community prior to the dissemination of her work. German explains that as producer/director she sets the tone and expects that her crew/cast follow her example.

Strong discussed the importance of working collectively with her team. Strong speaks to the work that still needs to be done in regard to Indigenous storytelling and the mainstream. Strong’s methodological approach to storytelling is collective and rooted in respect and responsibility. She says, “Making a film is more like community work; it’s not about me. It’s super collaborative, and that’s how I work. My primary goal is to support women and Indigenous artists first and foremost” (Strong, A., personal communication, December 18, 2017). She explains that Indigenous documentary in all its forms can provide an opportunity for those in Indigenous community who have been marginalized to share their own voice, and on their own terms. Strong asserts that as documentarians, we must be sensitive, aware, and mindful of not objectifying and further marginalizing individuals and communities.

In summary, Indigenous documentary is centred on creating a platform for Indigenous voice, which upholds our spiritual connection to self, place and to our Ancestors. Creating space
for Indigenous voice requires the documentarian to be *Accountable and Responsible* to the story, and to the community. All participants explained that the stakes are high for Indigenous documentarians because working with Indigenous story is personal – these are our relationships. All participants agreed that connecting with community is an essential method of Indigenous documentary, as well as following protocol when it comes to mapping out the dissemination process. Christian explained that there is a need to decolonize the self and to understand the difference between the colonial narratives and the Indigenous narrative. Claxton reminds me that reclaiming our cultural ways of being, language, and practices is an act of reciprocity and accountability. In addition, Coyes asserts that Indigenous documentarians are active participants in the storytelling process because there is always a connection to the story. Strong stresses that it is through the exploration of truth that we will find meaning and connection.

More so, all the participants involved in this study, stressed that they have a responsibility to the communities they engage with. They explain that the responsibility runs deep, and it is more than just gaining access to a community – it is a spiritual responsibility as well. Through our conversations, I have learned that they are accountable in regard to how they gather knowledge. The participants achieve responsibility and accountability by following protocol – protecting and caring for the story. Being responsible and respectful is establishing ethical principles in their practice of documentary. It is evident that the participants are executing personal and collective guidelines for future interactions and exchanges with Indigenous story and community.

### 5.2 Conclusion

In closing, this chapter presented the outward findings based on the participant responses from the interview phase of the research. Data sources for these findings come from the
interview transcripts, and findings were also informed by my notes and observations, and on occasion by the participant’s backgrounds working in documentary. Post interview, I reviewed the transcripts for themes that resonated with my research framework, and then I categorized the participants responses in accordance to (5) five core themes: *Land as Inspiration, Trauma and Healing, Indigenous Stories, Truth,* and lastly, *Accountability and Responsibility.* Additionally, through the lens of Indigeneity, I identified how the participants employ Indigenous documentary methodologies within their practices, for example, positioning themselves to the story by declaring their Indigeneity, and also, declaring their relationship to the story they engage with. The findings also discussed the importance of building trust with community, following protocol, being accountable and responsible to community, and honouring the diversity of truths.

Delving deep into the responses echoed the need for an increased level of awareness and engagement when it comes to our documentary methods as Indigenous documentarians. My study will provide more insight into the importance of Indigenous identity, self-determination and the significance of employing protocol and engage in distinctive Indigenous methods when working with story. My research model encourages respect for Indigenous knowledge, and it works to address the pedagogical and epistemological needs of Indigenous community.

*MooNoHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit* enables an understanding of spiritual consciousness, and an examination of shared stories that Indigenous documentarians can draw on throughout their careers in documentary. The responses to the interview questions were overall insightful and revealed significant ideologies in the participants’ approaches to story. The shared stories in the responses serve as the basis of understanding from which to draw on the importance of positionality in one’s practice. Defeating colonialism with documentary is to recognize how it is structured into western documentary film, and Indigenous documentarians
are disrupting it through the sharing of cultural knowledge and story. However, despite the challenges that were expressed in relation to impact of colonialism, they affirmed that through the sharing of Indigenous story, they work to sustain cultural knowledge and further support community wellness efforts.

Furthermore, participants asserted that documentary as a storytelling practice sustains and validates Indigenous ways of being, and story is the central focus of Indigenous ethos and epistemologies. Participants responses suggested that story is found in a diversity of Indigenous cultures. My conversations with the participants reminded me that we do not think alone. We are part of a collective of documentarians, and we are all working toward sovereignty, whether that be imagining the future, delving into the trauma of colonialism, exploring our pre-settler identities, or engaging with the spirit realm. Our collective knowledge includes valuing the many truths we engage with. Sharing story either that be through documentary, or during the interview process of this study, is about expressing our creative and cultural understandings of what it means to be Indigenous. It also became clear to me that self-representation and cultural sovereignty are common goals for the participants involved.

The act of bringing together their responses through a narrative inquiry has provided me a deeper awareness and understanding of my research model *MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit.* As it turned out, the participants contributed varied understandings to their Indigeneity. There was a strong emphasis on the relationship between Indigenous ways of being and story and how they resonate with collective and personal meaning. Documentary as a storytelling practice has proven to be an effective form of knowledge exchange, where the documentarian creates meaningful shifts in perspective. The *Outward Findings* cemented the
notion that the narrative is a way of grappling with the experience of others and honoring our own Indigenous documentary paradigms.

In the careful act of *MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit*, participants pay tribute and honour Indigenous ways of knowing through their documentary practices. Their documentary practices are rooted in their customary ways of being and informed by the generations before them. Documentary is both an art form and a form of knowledge, and evidently plays a key role in human understanding, as indicated throughout the responses outlined in this chapter. We all agree that creating worlds through the practice of documentary and allowing for meaningful knowledge exchange is key to our willingness to understand the world in which we live. The findings in this chapter prove that documentary as a storytelling platform manifests time and space – and archives our experiences both collectively and individually. Indigenous stories continue to carry agency and sustain our connection to our diverse ideologies, principles, livelihoods, and ways of being.

The *Outward Findings* explored reciprocity in practice, and in the pursuit of truth revealed that the participants are respectfully reclaiming an Indigenous ethos. Dudemaine et al. (2020) assert that “the values of reciprocity, participation, and respect for the communities concerned remain central to the creative process” (p. 50). It was clear that reciprocity was of the utmost importance for participants, and community relationships is approached in a reciprocal way. The findings demonstrated that the depth of relationship and complexity exists between Indigenous documentarians, and the individual and/or community who holds the story. The participants discussed that when they find themselves in a place of obtaining knowledge, they are mindful of implementing a respectful process. It is evident through our conversations that they

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deem it necessary that they actively adhere to cultural protocols and meet the expectations of the community.

The next chapter discusses the Inward Process of my study, summarizing (5) five selected projects of mine: (1) PLACenta, (2) AskIBOYZ, (3) Without Words, (4) NiiSoTeWak: Two Bodies, One Heart, and finally, (5) OshKiKiShiKaw: A New Day, including secondary literature weaved with commentary on the (5) emerging themes from the interviews with participants involved in this study.
Chapter 6: Inward Findings

This poem, *One Who is Looking* (Koostachin, 2018) from my book of poetry *Unearthing Secrets, Gathering Truths*, is inspired by my old spirit name, which was gifted to me in my twenties. In my younger years I spent a lot of time in ceremony, and this was the time when I started on the Red Path. The poem speaks to the time when I was struggling to find peace in my life. I felt like I was always searching, searching for peace of mind, while also trying to figure out my role as a young parent. By my mid-thirties, I held the responsibility of caring for four sons. Over many years of ceremony and finally finding my way, I was gifted a new name *Woman Who Holds Fire*.

**Poem 6   One Who is Looking**

spirits call her by name  
one who is looking  
uncovering teachings  
learning to live in the present  
not in a world that is yet to exist  
opoisoning the natural process of life  
mama  
mother of AShaNee  
mother of Spider  
mother of Wolf  
mother of Truth  
mother of Totem

shedding of the last *IsKwew*  
who wore my moccasins  
I no longer host her  
the one who is looking  
she rests now  
walking into the light  
step by step  
finding bravery  
new purpose
I become

IsKwew who holds IsKoTew

This chapter presents the *Inward Findings* from my self-study process, and it is sectioned into three parts. The first section discusses the *Overview of Self-Study*. I briefly summarize my pedagogical and ethical underpinnings, which in turn, serve to support my framework

*MooNaNaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit*. In the second section, *Response to Interview Questions*, I reflect on the interview questions posed to participants regarding the following themes: Positionality, Documentary Modality, Cultural Methodology, Emerging Themes, (de) Colonialism, Pre-Settler (*InNiNew*) Identity, and lastly; Accountability and Responsibility. The third section *Emerging Themes* explores (5) five of my selected documentary projects and the analysis, which involves an extensive self-reflexive in relation to Indigenous documentary.

Further, I examine the following documentaries as they relate to the emerging themes: (1) *Land as Inspiration* explores my APTN youth television series *AskiBOYZ* (2016) about two young Cree teens who set off on a journey to learn about diverse Indigenous practices; (2) *Trauma and Healing* discusses my short independent documentary *Without Words* (2015) about a Holocaust survivor and a Residential School warrior; (3) *Indigenous Stories* explores *PLACEnta* (2012) my award-winning short independent documentary regarding *InNiNeWak* birthing ceremonies; (4) *Truth* discusses my award-winning CBC short documentary *NiiSoTeWak: Two Bodies, One Heart* (2017) about *InNiNeWak* twin identity; and lastly, (5) *Responsibility and Accountability* explores my award winning CBC short documentary *OshKiKiShiKaw: A New Day* (2019) about my twins Coming of Age Ceremony.
6.1 Overview of Self-Analysis

The findings are informed by my notes and observations, and are based on my personal reflections working in the field of documentary. I theorize self-analysis as a methodology for studying professional practice because I have put myself in a place of growth and change. To act is to theorize. This study has proven that Indigenous documentarians offer strategies and pedagogies that can be utilized in the process of decolonizing documentary. Documentary plays a central role in articulating forms of resistance, self-determination, and sovereignty. I understand my documentary practice as an integrated expression of my lived experience and a means to sustain my cultural knowledge. My documentary practice is a form of personal storytelling that echoes my understanding of Indigeneity that also informs and shapes my individual and collective experiences. Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009), authors of *Self-Study of Practice as a Genre of Qualitative Research* state,

> When we have a memory of a past event or retell a story of it, we bring it forward into the present moment, thus repositioning it on the landscape of our total lived experience.

The present moment is determined in some ways by our past. (p. 23)

My life up until this point of time is informed and influenced by the their/his/herstory of the *InNiNeWak*, and I am actively working to reposition my familial story in the present. Self-analysis will allow me to further explore and deepen my understanding of documentary as a form of implicit knowing.

Through this stage of self-study, I examine the knowledge shared with me in conversations during the *Inward Process*. While I fully acknowledge that we have our own unique practices and styles, *MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit* as a research framework and in practice is deeply rooted in my relationship to story. Through this study, my
relationship to documentary storytelling became more relevant as I examined secondary literature and reflected on the responses of my participants. I fully understand how my experience as a mid-career Indigenous documentarian, with industry work ongoing even during my studies, informs my research. My professional experience has enhanced my self-study process, and because of this, I have placed myself in an insider/outsider relationship with other documentarians to ensure that I was actively working toward objectivity, if at all possible, when reflecting upon their conversations with me. Furthermore, through sharing my self-study of my documentary practice in this research, I am adding another dimension to this dissertation, that of an academic researcher, to the existing cultural relationships I have with my documentary community.

I applied my reflections to the inward findings because I am an Indigenous documentarian and I am contributing to Indigenous documentary theory. I am part of the conversation. Also, I tested my theory of MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew by reflecting on the responses by participants and the emerging themes. This study started from the self and therefore from my own positionality rooted in a subjective approach. My InNiNeWak teachings remind me of the importance of telling your own story first, and know it well, before you share other people’s story. I have shared their stories in relation to their documentary practice in this thesis and they are personal and relational. Positioning myself to their story is an InNiNeWak approach. My inward findings reference other emerging themes in my work such as family, community and ceremony. My focus was organizing my self-reflection in line with how I approached the outward methodology and analysis because I am part of this community of Indigenous documentarians and I can relate and contribute. Therefore, I explored how my positionality to Indigenous story and my relationship to colleagues shapes my practice, and I examined how my
InNiNeWak beliefs and values align with their responses – the emerging themes and of course, documentary theory. Furthermore, objectivity is a challenge when reflecting on work that is personal and relational. Indigenous documentarians embrace subjectivity, as I have with this research, because my thesis, which is my story – truth – and speaks to the importance of self-representation. The documentaries I produce are, for the most part, subjective, reflexive, ceremonial stories that are important to me and often times include my family, friends, and community.

6.2 Response to Interview Questions

In this section, I briefly reflect upon the core themes stemming from the interview questions that were posed to participants during the interview phase of this research. The self-study component of this section includes my understanding of Indigenous documentary theory. The purpose of responding to the core themes outlined in the interview questions are to provide insight and feelings about my documentary practice. I reflect on methodological and epistemological aspects of my documentary practice. I explore the core interview themes as follows: Positionality, Documentary Modality, Cultural Methodology, Emerging Themes, (de) Colonialism, Pre-Settler (InNiNew) Identity, and lastly; Accountability and Responsibility.

Positionality: Over the years, I have gained an understanding and deep respect for documentary as a storytelling tool for Indigenous documentarians. My InNiNeWak teachings remind me of the importance of telling your own story first, and know it well, before you share other people’s story. This sentiment makes sense to me. Sharing your life with the world is no easy task; one can feel extremely vulnerable and exposed, just as in the case with my personal documentary works. Only now, after producing several films and a television series, I understand why positioning yourself to story is an appropriate approach. In addition, it is important to
understand how susceptible subject/s may feel when sharing personal stories with the documentarian.

My identity as an InNiNew documentarian plays a central role in how and why I tell the stories I do. At this point in my career, I do not feel a pull to tell stories from outside of my community, however I welcome the challenge. Our stories are complex and rich with cultural teachings and knowledge, therefore, prior to sharing Indigenous story, I ask myself the following questions: Who I am in relation to the story? What is the relationship I hold to the story I want to share? These questions act as a guideline – my method and approach to Indigenous story are shaped by my InNiNeWak beliefs and values as an IsKwew is key in how I approach the stories I engage with.

Documentary Modality: As mentioned previously, I consider myself a fluid artist because I am comfortable with varied types of storytelling platforms. The stories I share are informed by my community, as well as other Indigenous communities, and documentary is a means to communicate Indigenous stories, including methodologies that support Indigenous ways of being and doing. Also, I have come to appreciate that documentary modality can encompass a wider range of platforms than I originally believed, for instance, looped video, soundscapes, installation, and stop motion. It is a versatile format that allows a documentarian to explore varied platforms. Exploring the varied forms of modes of documentary reasserts a fluid, no holds approach to documentary. A mixing modality allows more expressive, stylistically free form ways of documentary storytelling (Marcus & Kara 2016 p. xIv). A range of representational strategies provide an opportunity to diversify and employ into the domain of new technology. Over the course of my career, I have adopted different attitudes and I have embraced varied modes of engaging with Indigenous story. By doing so I have worked to examine the complex
paradigms of Indigenous representation. I have also opened myself up to taking advantage of expanding my understanding of knowledge production in documentary, the self-study forced me to challenge any limited ideologies I may carry regarding what constitutes an Indigenous documentary modality.

*Cultural Methodology:* Our Indigenous knowledge systems are interlaced with our artistic, and socio-political and spiritual development. Indigenous methodology maps out our engagements with each other and our spirit – *truth* – stories. Our knowledge systems are tied to place and rooted in our their/his/herstories, which some believe are informed by our Ancestors. My teachings describe this process as going back seven generations. According to Jo-ann Archibald (2008), Indigenous knowledge is holistic and entails being in touch with body, mind, spirit, and our emotions. Indigenous people value traditional ways of knowing, our Elders, and our orality, and we are affirming our right to elaborate, sustain, and transmit our knowledge systems in all our respective disciplines (p.93). Story can have a powerful influence on people and at times, they can become a guide for change and growth. Some of our stories unfold meanings in our personal lives. Our knowledge systems can contribute to our overall wellness, and this is the reason why I engage with the stories I do – essentially to create positive change in our communities.

*Emerging Themes:* Many themes emerge from my documentary work, and more recently, I have been increasingly focused on *InNiNeWak* values, and stories that Indigenous youth and children can engage with; my goal is for our youth to see themselves represented in positive ways. My body of work reflect stories of survivance and our strength as a people. I would like to explore Indigenous knowledge that deepens my understanding of Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and cosmologies. I explore my multidimensional body of understanding through
documentary. I aim to engage with multiple worldviews in all their extraordinary dimensions, and for me, this becomes central to a more in depth understanding InNiNeWak knowledge systems. Also, I would like work toward creating more inviting documentary platforms that allow for Indigenous documentarians to tell our stories from an Indigenous lens and one that speaks to our diversity as a people.

The emerging themes in my documentary work provide viewers with a contextualized account of the message being presented; this is the case with my two documentaries NiiSoTeWak (2017) and OshKiKiShiKaw (2016) where the stories are personal and about my family. Generally, the themes in my documentary work focuses on positive representation and I work to provide members of my community to speak for themselves. Also, my methodology often times confront discriminatory colonial ideologies regarding Indigeneity. Indigenous story is an important process of recovery and in the remaking of futurity. It became evident during this study that there is a need to highlight knowledge found in Indigenous story; our stories can be a space to encourage reflection and discussion.

*(de) Colonialism:* There is a need for increased awareness and engagement. In returning the gaze back to the Indigenous documentarian, we reveal decolonized processes (Knopf 2010). As Indigenous peoples, we are often faced with an unwillingness to go through an uncomfortable process of decolonization, due to ignorance regarding the impact of colonialism and Indigenous their/his/herstories. Moving to an Indigenous focus deepens viewers’ understanding of decolonizing potential, and there are useful insights from such an intervention (Monani & Adamson, 2017). Indigenous documentary counters the single narrative of Indigenous peoples, and we do so with our own diverse understandings of our their/his/herstories. Documentarians are challenging the colonial discourses within documentary by paying respect to place, and our
knowledge systems are informed by our Ancestral lands. Through imaginative possibility
viewers move beyond colonial narratives.

*Pre-Settler (InNiNew) Identity:* My thesis *MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew* embodies the act of
unearthing our ancient stories, and my framework explores how our stories have never left us;
my cultural teachings remind me that stories are gifted to us in *PoWaMeWin* (dream state) and
they also come to us in ceremony. Many of the ancient stories come to fruition with
conversations I have had with Knowledge Keepers and Elders from my community. My
teachings inform me that we have to be open to the messages from the spirit realm, even though
this colonial world we navigate often distracts us from our spirit. Our pre-settler stories are a
powerful force, and they guide us through our lives, providing us with support when we lose our
way. Our stories are universal because we are human and we are all related, therefore, story
carries agency. Story is spirit – it is a true blessing to receive story from another place and time.

Our connection to the pre-settler self is alive and well, because it exists in the act of
unearthing of spirit - story – *MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew*. In unearthing story, we create new and
innovative work, and the mere fact that I am an Indigenous documentarian, using western tools
that were once used against us, is revolutionary. Moreover, I am continuously adapting to the
ever-expanding nature of technology to ensure my stories captures a global audience. My
methodological approach to documentary reveals the complexity and the limitations that exist
within my practice because I am constantly reflecting on what I could have done differently in
moving forward – I work to honour the ancient stories in order for me to fully reimagine the
future.

*Accountability and Responsibility:* Accountability focuses on justification, staying
focused on achieving the best outcome, and I can achieve this by following protocol set by the
communities I engage with. Being responsible means that I understand that protocols are never fixed, and they tend to vary from community to community. Understanding accountability and responsibility entails using protocols respectfully. Indigenous documentary practices provide ethical ways of working with community and when used with the upmost respect our practices ensure narrative (visual) sovereignty. Indigenous peoples have survived years of oppression, and our fight is far from over. We have also survived cultural repression and misrepresentation. Indigenous documentary theory includes the protection of our cultural property rights; we have control over our stories and we are the authors of our own stories.

Being accountable and responsible is part of the process of revitalization and expression, where we seek to honour, respect, and privilege Indigenous voices. For me, when producing new work, I respect my relationship with the story, and with the community I am working with by informing and communicating openly with individuals and community. Indeed, Indigenous documentary can create meaningful change in the industry because the documentarian seeks to find balance while looking to the future.

Protocols are a means to be accountable and responsible to ourselves as the carrier of story and to the community. My stories disrupt the colonial gaze. My documentary work locates the truth in my cultural story, and I reach beyond the historical confines of colonialism by examining my understanding of InNiNeWak identity and ways of knowing and doing. I ensure that my work is accountable to the source and I hold myself responsible because the stakes are high.

My first documentary feature Remembering Inninimowin: The Language of the Human Beings (2010), a personal story of loss and reclamation, was a pivotal story for me to share because it dealt with the death of my KoKoom. The documentary starts with the tragic loss of my
Nanan (KoKoom), and the story follows my journey of remembering. My Nanan was my first teacher and her death changed the trajectory of my life. My teachers are my grandparents, they taught me about the importance of honouring my InNiNeWak identity and my documentary work pays tribute to their life.

My identity as an InNiNew is my arts practice, there is no separating the two. My positionality ensures that I sustain and respect my Indigenous storytelling methodologies, and the InNiNeWak principles and values I had the privilege of growing up with. My documentary practice examines Indigeneity through personal and community led storylines. I create an archive for future generations to know and understand their roots, and the stories I share transcends time and space. My experience working in documentary has been both rewarding and challenging, but I look forward to further developing my skills and exploring new and innovative modes of documentary.

6.3 Emerging Themes

As outlined in the previous chapter, I carefully reviewed the transcripts from the interview phase of this study, locating themes that resonated with my research questions. By categorizing their responses in accordance with (5) five emerging themes, I present and weave my ideas, thoughts and respective reflections throughout this section. I have selected documentary projects that best relate to the identified themes, are seen as follows: Land as Inspiration: AskiBOYZ (2016); Trauma and Healing: Without Words; Indigenous Stories: PLACEnta (2012); Truth: NiiSoTeWak: Two Bodies, One Heart; and lastly, Accountability and Responsibility: OshKiKiShiKaw: A New Day. My documentary work demonstrates an intersection of modes and approaches.
It is important to note that my creative expression as a documentarian could be understood as fluid. I am comfortable with various kinds of storytelling platforms, ranging from documentary, scripted narratives, television programming, media installation, performance art, and creative writing. For the self-study, I selected my youth documentary series and four short documentaries, two of which were produced with the CBC. In the film industry, I would be considered an independent filmmaker, meaning, for the most part, that I am often credited as the writer, producer, and director for most of my media work. Although I carry extensive experience working with Canadian broadcasters, I am often financially responsible for promoting, marketing, and submitting my work to film festivals. I am faced with many barriers, and I have limited resources and finances for international dissemination and promotion of my film work.

6.1.1 Land as Inspiration: *Askiboyz*

I am the proud creator and co-producer of the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) youth series *Askiboyz*. The idea of the series was inspired by the urban and rural experiences of Indigenous youth. In 2010, when we started pre-production, there was limited representation for young Indigenous youth. My television series *Askiboyz* focuses on my two eldest sons Asivak and Mahiigan Koostachin as they embark on a journey of self-discovery, reclamation, and resurgence. The story of *Askiboyz* was inspired by my lived experience as a storyteller, mother, daughter, and the granddaughter of two strong *InNiNeWak* warriors. My *MoshKeKo* *AsKi* roots run deep; I am strongly tied to the land of my mother’s people and to the orality of place – the land in which my Ancestors lived. As an *InNiNew* mother of four sons, Asivak (Spider), Mahiigan (Wolf), Tapwewin (Speaking Truth), and Pawaken (Totem), I wholeheartedly understand my role as their life-guide, and I honour the responsibility I carry. My late grandparents both sustained themselves with the generous gifts of *AsKi*. My late *MoShoom*
was a kind, intelligent and thoughtful person who dedicated his life to his family. He provided for his family and community by living off the land. MoShoom’s role as an OkiMaw (leader) was to ensure that everyone in his community was self-sustaining; he spent a lot of his time bringing young people out on the land, and teaching them how to hunt and trap. MoShoom’s life is a constant reminder to instill Indigenous values and knowledge in the lives of our youth and children. My grandparent’s stories are still alive today, they live through the actions of my family. Scholar Marie Battiste (2000) reminds us:

That as Indigenous people our values are so deeply embedded within Indigenous knowledges that it is difficult to distinguish the empirical content from the moral message. Stories about animals are sometimes not only about animals at all, but about proper human behaviour, and most uproarious tales about the foibles and misdeeds of animals often contain wise insights about community ecology. (p. 179)

Our stories are guide us as a community and it is through the old narratives, we are provided with sacred knowledge of how to live in balance with AsKi and other life forces. My grandparents taught me the value of sustaining our InNiNeWak knowledge system and the importance of ensuring the next generation are provided with cultural teachings. Cultural teachings and stories located in AsKiBOYZ are sacred. The stories of place, community, and the lived experience of Knowledge Keepers and Elders remind viewers/listeners of our connection to these lands. Iseke (2008) notes:

These stories recount great deed of Indigenous peoples, providing children access to stories of their families and community encouraging them to look to the past with pride and confidence so that they may face the future with courage making new stories for the next generation. (p. 139)
This notion of passing on story is the premise of my series, but sadly before my MoShoom could take my sons out on the land, he passed away. MoShoom’s existence on AsKi was inspired by his time hunting and trapping, and his knowledge reflected an InNiNew ethos and way of being. When our family lost my grandparents there was great sense of loss. AskIBOYZ was birthed from this void. According to scholars Dion and Salamanca (2014), within Indigenous conceptions, history is not a chronological telling of events but rather encompasses those events that are significant to a people's understanding of themselves. The knowledge they carried rooted my family; their teachings informed and guided us on how to be InNiNeWak. As my eldest sons grew older, I knew they were feeling disconnected, and the television series became a turning point for them as young InNiNeWak.

I understand now that the central goal of the series was for my sons to experience life on the land and to reconnect with community Knowledge Keepers and Elders. Another key goal was to invite other Indigenous youth to learn alongside Asivak and Mahiigan. At the time, we were living in downtown Toronto, and my sons were soon becoming young men and the series ensured that they had a strong understanding of cultural practices and knowledge. This was a critical time in their development, they needed guidance and an opportunity to learn. Dion and Salamanca (2014) assert:

The work of contemporary Indigenous artists provides access to ancestral teachings in contemporary times. By engaging with the work, participating in artistic practice, and gathering to listen and learn from artists, Indigenous people in urban centers create sites of strength and survivance. (p. 164)
AskiBOYZ provided an opportunity for my sons to reconnect with their identity as InNiNeWak. As a family we participated in community events and ceremonies in Toronto, but I wanted more for them, I wanted to expose them to experiences in community and on the land.

During production we travelled to 13 different communities across Ontario and Quebec. My sons spent time with community members learning about cultural knowledge and practices. Asivak and Mahiigan are now in their twenties, and they still speak highly of their experiences and to the relationships they formed while shooting AsKiBOYZ. They often tell me that AsKiBOYZ was life altering and that it continues to impact on their lives. The series is a testament to significance of community and land-based learning; it is an Indigenous pedagogy embedded in an Indigenous knowledge system. They embarked on a spiritual journey where they actively engaged with diverse cultural ways of being and doing.

There are several ways of telling story, and stories carry different ethical values, and AsKiBOYZ was a means to use the story of Asivak and Mahiigan to inspire other youth to reach out and reconnect with their Indigeneity and participate in living culture. As the creator, writer, director, and producer, my primary focus was to inspire youth to nurture their relationship to the land. AsKiBOYZ was a significant vehicle for many young people in the community toward self-determination and knowledge building. The series was successful in engaging with Indigenous youth across Turtle Island in culturally responsive learning, and AsKiBOYZ was an act of revitalization. Wilson (2016) suggests that there are many levels to our storytelling practice, including the sacred stories that embody our survivance as a people (p. 89). With every episode, my sons were embodying Indigenous knowledge and practice, and the series eventually became more than television show, it became a way of being and I would argue an act of decolonization. The series honours the wisdom, strength and resiliency of my late grandparents and pays homage.
to our Ancestors. The Ancestral teachings of the *InNiNeWak* embrace equality, cultural pride, and how-to-live in balance with *AsKi*. *AskiBOYZ* employs Indigenous values, principles, and ideologies. The show replaces the mainstream misrepresentation my children and others have been subjected to and replaced them with stories of pride, humour, love, and hope.

Interestingly enough, for me, the series is not necessarily about gender identity, or masculinity for that matter, yet it has come up in conversation. Scholar Rachel Giese (2018) called the series charming and sweet, offering a contemporary and relevant image of Indigenous masculinity. In an interview with Giese, my son Asivak speaks to how his experience on the land grew into a deeper understanding of how to be a strong *InNew* man and the significance of reconnecting with culture: “I learned that masculinity is not about having power over your environment, but learning the skill set that allows you to navigate and to live in harmony with your environment. You can’t have power over Mother Earth” (pp. 148-149). My goal as a mother is to raise my sons to be proud *InNiNeWak*, and to hold the teachings of our grandparents close, and the series provide a pathway to cultural knowledge.

![Image 6.1: Youth Television Series AskiBOYZ, 2013 Chippewa of the Thames From left to right: Cassius Spears, Mahiigan Koostachin, and Asivak Koostachin](image-url)
AskIBOYZ underscores the integrity and the methodology of dissemination this Indigenous story with a national audience. In presenting my work, I am inviting receivers of the knowledge into a shared conversation to strengthen and build on Indigenous documentary theory (Pinnegar & Hamilton 2009 p. 117). The series also presented an alternative perspective to mainstream notions of Indigeneity. The series embodied the theme of Land as Inspiration, and my sons were privileged to have the opportunity to learn Indigenous knowledge directly from Elders and Knowledge Keepers. This is their inherent right as Indigenous people. Scholar Marie Battiste (2000) tells us that “Indigenous knowledge is inherently tied to people’s mutual relationship with their place and with each other over time” (95). Land-based learning significantly influenced and rooted Asivak and Mahiigan as they embarked on the next phase of their lives.

6.1.2 Trauma and Healing: Without Words

My short documentary Without Words explores trauma and healing from the perspective of a Holocaust survivor and a residential school warrior. The messaging weaved in the documentary also speaks to the importance of cross-cultural healing; learning from outside of our communities. Self-study as a methodology allowed me the opportunity to position the self within the research. Examining the self became a vital part in understanding how my documentary practice lends itself to my research question. I have situated my experience in documentary within the study. The theme of Trauma and Healing is personal, as is my documentary practice. The cycle of self-study begins with reflection and exploring how my work contributes to Indigenous documentary theory. The survivor’s courage as seen in Without Words offers viewers/listeners an opportunity to reflect on their own experiences with trauma, and perhaps even, encourage them to share their own stories of healing.
In 2013, I was invited to participate with the *March of Remembrance* program. It proved to be a challenging time for all involved in the program: we were learning about the Holocaust from survivors who accompanied participants. I immediately connected with Pinchas Gutter, a Holocaust survivor. He is a strong kind man with an abundance of incredible stories of love, pain, resiliency, and hope. I recall drifting off to sleep on the bus as I listened to his words. Pinchas often shared stories of childhood, recalling his life prior to the atrocities of Auschwitz. The stories of the survivors were incredibly haunting, yet necessary in obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the events that unfolded – they were there. Two weeks were spent travelling Germany and Poland on a bus, and a lot of time was spent listening to their first-hand accounts and visiting concentration camps sites and memorials.

Nearing the end of the trip, we visited a synagogue in Poland. Pinchas immediately sang and prayed in his language, and then invited us to join hands. He led us in dance. I remember thinking about my mother, and I wondered whether she will ever feel that at peace with her trauma from residential school. She continues to live with her trauma – she tells me that her pain plagues her waking days. This was the moment in time when *Without Words* was conceived. Amid the chaos of travelling, I found a way out through story. The act of sharing and reflecting supports us in our journey of understanding our own humanity, and it also helps us recognize the experiences that shape us. This time travelling with Pinchas reminded me that reciprocity involves honouring spiritual and human connections. I will forever honour the teachings of Pinchas Gutter, who to this day, I refer to as my honorary grandfather.

Years passed and in 2015, I decided to reach out to colleagues working in the film industry and asked if they would be interested in helping me with *Without Words*. Week later, we were in full production. We filmed in three days with a budget of approximately five hundred
dollars, not including the in-kind labour of volunteer crew. Later, during post-production, I struggled with weaving these two different stories of trauma and healing. I was cautious about comparing trauma, and I attempted to steer away from any hierarchy of oppression. Instead, my focus was on cross-cultural healing. When the documentary was complete, I shared Without Words with Pinchas and my mother and asked for their blessing. They both approved, and soon after it screened at film festivals around the world.

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\text{Image 6.2: Without Words Documentary, 2015 Sudbury.}
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\text{Photo credit: Rik Sokolowicz - From left to right: Rita Okimawinew and Pinchas Gutter}
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Without Words created a platform for meaningful dialogue. The stories weaved within the documentary are a powerful force, a testament to how stories of healing can transform relationships, humanize experiences, and shift perspectives. Stories, like the ones shared in Without Words are healing because they reflect the complexity of humanity. They assert their presence and articulate a distinct lived experience. The documentary informed the viewer/listener of the importance of cross-cultural healing.
6.1.3 Indigenous Stories: PLACenta

Over the last several years, I have produced documentaries regarding Indigenous issues, ceremony, and stories inspired by my experiences as an InNiNew IsKwew. My short documentary PLACenta (2104) was conceived during an Indigenous storytelling residency at the Banff Centre for the Arts. As an invited documentarian, my work involved developing ideas that would easily translate into a digital story. At that time, my partner and I had our five-year-old twins’ placenta in our freezer, and since this seemed to be a shared experience among many of my Indigenous friends, it became a narrative to explore. My journey commenced immediately after the closing of the residency and in 2012 I was in full production.

My short documentary PLACenta encompasses my lived experience as a mother, which is made up of moments that leads me to present time. Documentary as a storytelling platform has allowed me to reflect on a past experience, bringing it forward. The self-study phase of this research afforded me the time necessary to reconsider, re-evaluate, and reinterpret questions about Indigenous birthing ceremonies. The self-study, most importantly, has provided me the time to my retell and relive my own Indigenous story. PLACenta discusses the importance of our ceremonies and how in reclaiming our practices, we decolonize the self. Sharing Indigenous Stories is a practice of Indigenous culture that sustains and validates our epistemologies (Iseke 2013 p. 559). PLACenta was informed by my relationship with the IsKweWak in my family and by my deep connection to place, the land of my Ancestors. Thomas King reminds storytellers to be cautious of the stories we share, and to be aware of the stories shared with us (10). I am aware and respectful of the responsibility I carry as a documentarian. PLACenta is my story to tell because it is a personal story of reclamtion. The stories I have been privy to all play an important role in my documentary practice. In reflecting on PLACenta, my self-analysis process
begins with acknowledging my roots and paying respect to stories I have had the privilege of bundling in my story pouch. The ceremonial stories I engage with explore the past, present, and the future.

Being a documentarian has cleared a path, allowing me to reveal meaningful narratives and on my own terms. PLACEnta is about reclaiming my story, my cultural identity, reconnecting to place, and sharing ceremonial stories with others who may have been severed from their own birthing rites. Visual sovereignty is the articulation of Indigenous cultural ways of being and identities (Dowell 2013 p. 2). In order to achieve sovereignty as in the case with my documentary practice, I must also acknowledge that there is a shared anxiety; Indigenous documentary has become a pathway to healing. The documentary creates a platform to discuss health from an Indigenous lens. Many of our stories have been torn apart by the residential school experience, and even in birth we are faced with colonial violence. Exploring ceremony in documentary (employing community protocols in the process) has become a healthy way to unearth cultural knowledge.

PLACEnta also speaks to my mother’s heart wrenching story of surviving residential school; there is no separating the suffering from the past from the suffering of today. Sorrow is shared within family and community in our stories and our grief is intergenerational, however there are many other threads of Indigenous story to explore, such as resiliency, pride, connection and survivance. While sharing our stories through documentary, we conjure an awakening, motivating the first phase of restoring balance, and most importantly spirit (self). There is renewal and healing that takes place, (re)connection and awareness in the act of raising consciousness, and what follows is a collective movement: we are, then, striving for sovereignty together.

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In summary, documentary as a storytelling platform is accessible, affordable, and manageable, with a central focus on Indigenous story, from an Indigenous lens. According to Gauthier (2013) “Indigenous documentaries also transfers authority to Indigenous people, redefining the ‘voiceless victim’ as a proactive political participant, calling attention to unequal power relationships” (p. 104). I would add that our Indigenous documentaries are not all reactive; they not only demonstrate our legitimacy as documentarians, but also our responsibility as caretakers of story. PLACenta was crafted to facilitate the uncovering of many truths. In honouring our stories, we also pay tribute to the Indigenous knowledge systems that continue to feed and sustain our connection to our PLACE on this land.

6.1.4 Truth: NiiSoTeWak

In 2017, I released my first CBC short documentary, NiiSoTeWak: Two Bodies, One Heart, which follows my youngest sons, Tapwewin and Pawaken, 10 years old at the time, as they delved into twin identity. Their identity is informed by my cultural experiences and those of my partner. Like many First Nations youth today, the twins are caught between contemporary and traditional worldviews, experiencing shifts between rural and urban environments. The documentary addresses issues of urban Indigeneity and both twins describe their experience as
an InNiNeWak living on the Unceded Ancestral lands of the Coast Salish Peoples, far away from MoshKeKo AsKi. The story emerges from their questions about Indigeneity as they explore relationships with family, community, and the new landscape they now call home.

NiiSoTeWak is an honest and raw glimpse of what it is like to be a twin and InNiNew twin in unfamiliar territory. Indigenous knowledge is expressed in several ways that share an inherent statement of presence. The twins articulate intimate stories of individuality and examine the notion of NiiSoTeWak. They invite viewers into their personal and complex twin world as they define NiiSoTeWak on their own terms – they explain their identity as being a unified spirit that lives in two separate bodies. Through the lens of 10-year-old boys, the short documentary cultivates their capacity to understand themselves as InNiNeWak.

Furthermore, Tapwewin and Pawaken explore the significance of their names and the stories behind them, including the challenge of having to sustain the significance of cultural ways of being and doing. NiiSoTeWak is an example of exploring Truth from the perspective of Indigenous youth living in an urban centre. Drawing on knowledge and insights gained from interviews with family members, the goal of NiiSoTeWak was to create a safe space for the twins to share their truth. Reflecting on this documentary allowed me to access the layers of my experience as I uncover personal practical knowledge as use it to understand the creative and strategic choices that I made for NiiSoTeWak. The examination of my documentary works supports me in the study of my own practice, unveiling the tacit knowledge I carry as a documentarian.

In summary, my deep implicit knowledge of Indigenous storytelling holds the promise for further examination of my documentary practice. When exploring truth in my documentary work, I highlight the different ways my practice can contribute to the MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew.
Unearthing Spirit. NiiSoTeWak describes the twin’s understanding of truth. The documentary embodies Indigenous knowledge, revealing the interesting ways the twins interact and navigate in the world in which they live. Also, NiiSoTeWak allows for complex representations that support Indigenous youth in reconnecting with culture and identity. The layered knowledges shared throughout the documentary address their thinking of Indigeneity.

NiiSoTeWak pushes the boundaries of documentary, the mere fact that the twins comprised interview questions without my, the director’s, input is an uncommon approach to documentary. This mode of documentary allowed for the element of surprise and for more freedom during the interview process, which made for a stronger documentary in the end. This documentary centres itself on sharing truths, and in NiiSoTeWak, all four of my sons come together to discuss their experiences and share their understanding of love, relationship, family, and Indigenous identity.

6.1.5 Accountability and Responsibility: OshKiKiShiKaw: A New Day

My identity as an InNiNew documentarian plays a huge role in how and why I tell the stories I do. We must always hold ourselves accountable to the stories we share and ensure that we are responsible to the community. My method and approach to Indigenous story are shaped by my InNiNeWak beliefs and values, which are imbedded in cultural protocol and practice. My positionality as an IsKwew plays a significant role in how I hold myself responsible. My short documentary OshiKiKiShiKaw (2019) speaks to the importance of following protocol and being accountable to cultural knowledge and teachings. OskiKiShiKaw has become a living story, an act of resistance, and a way to offer Indigenous youth a sense of futurity. My creative goal as a storyteller is to create innovative stories that young people can relate to, while ensuring my stories are deeply rooted in cultural values and principles.
OshKiKiShiKaw was filmed in my home community, Attawapiskat First Nation where we set off from Vancouver to perform my twin’s ceremony. At the time, my mother lived in Ottawa, and she met us in northern Ontario. Once we all arrived in Attawapiskat, we discussed options as to how and where the ceremony was going to take place. We asked my relation Adrian Sutherland, a Knowledge Keeper, for assistance. He suggested we take a day trip to Twin Island therefore we filmed our voyage to the island by boat. OshKiKiShiKaw is a ceremonial documentary. It is a story about the twins preparing for the cutting of their hair for the first time. The documentary also captures them preparing for their first ever Sweat Lodge Ceremony (known as a cleansing ceremony), but I had to be mindful while filming in community. Under InNiNeWak cultural law, we seldomly film our ceremonies, for that reason, respectful negotiation transpired. Being accountable and responsible involves that I openly communicate; it requires a commitment to learning and change.

In summary, I feel responsible and accountable not only to my community but to myself as a documentarian. My self-study is continuous; I reflect on the stories I am gifted with and I
take the process of storytelling seriously. I wanted my documentary *OshKiKiShiKaw* to highlight the beauty, strength and resiliency that exists in my community, and I was successful. Since the state of emergency declared years ago, many outsiders have been in and out of my community, reporting on stories that do not necessarily reflect the reality of my community. So, when I produced this documentary, I centred the film on hope, love, relationship, and reclamation. While filming when community members gathered, we came together to celebrate the twins’ ceremony and I felt that my community awoke. My children now have their own story of home to share, and this story allowed us to engage in ceremony as a community. *OshKiKiShiKaw* honours my Ancestral knowledge and cultural resources (Iseke 2013 p. 559) provided a means to reconnect. After deep reflection, I understood the documentary as a gift; I was gifting the community with a ceremony that had not been practiced in a very long time.

**6.2 Conclusion**

In conclusion, my self-analysis worked as an evaluative tool, where I assign merit to the body of work I have produced over the years. The *Inward process* allowed me to make connections between my self-study and the themes identified in this study. It includes an analysis of the themes and a review of my selected independent documentary work. The self-study of my practice supported an in-depth examination that privileges the self and considers how my identity shapes my practice. It was helpful in exploring how my *InNiNeWak* beliefs and values align with Indigenous documentary theory. It became increasingly evident that Indigenous documentary storytelling, based on Indigenous theory, establishes respectful relationships (Iseke & Moore 2011 p. 21). Including the *Inward Findings* permitted me to reflect on my documentary practice in regards to the study of *MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew/ Unearthing Spirit*, and more specifically on how my work relates to my research question: *How does our positionality as Indigenous*
documentarians shape our creativity, and the concepts, themes, and forms explored in documentary? The aim of the Inward Process was to improve my understanding of Indigenous documentary theory and how my approach to Indigenous story can contribute to the practice and theory.

However, the Inward Process is limited by my predispositions and biases; complete objectivity is a challenge when reflecting on work that is personal and relational. The documentaries I produce are, for the most part, subjective, reflexive, ceremonial stories that relational. More so, during this process of self-study, I allowed myself to be open to locate opportunities for growth, which perhaps will lead me to notice and reconceptualize my documentary practice. My analysis of my growth as a documentarian provides me the opportunity to study my experiences more closely, and in turn, led to working differently, further enhancing my knowledge and skillset. Scholars Pitthouse-Morgan and Samaras (2015) note that the process of sharing and interpreting personal story makes one more critical and positions the self in relation to cultural contexts. They assert that “Storytelling as a methodological tool for self-study” promotes reflection, inquiry and dialogue (p. 9). Self-study involves various methods and strategies, and the advantages of my self-reflection was the capacity to question my practice based on observations and personal experience.

Unfortunately, there was not an opportunity to discuss the result of my Inward Process with the other documentarians in this study, yet during the interview process, they were able to offer useful advice and feedback. Locating the time to meet with the other participants was difficult, and not necessary for the purpose of this self-study. My focus was on self-generated storytelling, narrative and reflection on my method as a documentarian. It involved varied methods, from reviewing transcripts, reflecting and journaling where I worked to further
understand our relationalities. My method involved sharing space with the participants to discuss our documentary practices, and then involved narrative inquiry together with examining the self in relation to documentary practice.

Overall, this methodology of self-analysis assisted in the examination of the complexities of working with Indigenous story and community. Dudemaine et al. (2020) remind us that “the values of reciprocity, participation, and respect for the communities concerned remain central to the creative process” (50). As documentarian, and as outlined in this chapter, I hold specific guidelines when working with community. By and large, my aim was to improve my communication, ensuring the community defines for itself, how they want to be involved. Storytelling as witnessing and remembering allows engagement with ideas of the past and supports transforming ourselves today (Iseke, 2013). I work to balance the relationship with community, and during the early stages of pre-production as in the case with all my productions, concerns and suggestions were addressed. My documentary practice centres on Indigenous epistemology and self-determination, empowering community voice. Scholars Susan Dion and Angela Salamanca assert that “Acknowledging Indigenous experiences, perspectives, and histories challenges the dominant narrative” (p. 165). Indeed, we as Indigenous peoples bear the marks of colonialism and live with its legacy (Dion & Salamanca 2018 p. 185), but my documentary practice shifts gears; I explore self-determination, resurgence, and decolonization.

I established interesting relationships with technology and learning. Of course, there is a need for innovative technologies and novel discoveries in relation to Indigenous story, and it is critical for learning environments to reposition narratives of technology so that they privilege Indigenous voice (Bang et al. 2013).
Chapter 7: Conclusion

With this poem, *Shape Shifter* (Koostachin, 2018) from my book of poetry *Unearthing Secrets, Gathering Truths*, I am writing about the many forms our sprits take on while travelling through several existences. This poem embraces the significance of ceremony and the dream world – I’ve been taught that it is the window to other worlds/dimensions. It is through dream – *PoWaMeWin* – that we accept our spirit in its purest form. My teachings tell me that we meet and converse with our Ancestors in dream and this is where we find the answers to our questions.

Poem 7   *Shape Shifter*

Earth gently finding its way under my toes
   sand cold
   refreshing
   I play
   spinning round and round
   arms stretched out

   smells fill my nostrils
   sweetness of nature
*MasKwa* nearby watching

*MasKwa* shoves me with its warmth
   wet nose tickling
   breath in in my face
   seeking refuge

   soft brownness
   tiny
   insignificant
   reassurance
   safety
*MasKwa* tumbles down
transformation begins again
empty black fur at my feet
soulless now
gone
traveling afar
through dimensions

underneath me
movement
possessed by spirit
leaving my pale skin behind too
piled below me
like dirty laundry
piled high with all my dark memories
I shed the weight of my shell
shape shifter

lovely
skin glistening in the remaining sunlight
sparkling lake
lights the sky
warm summer breeze

*IsKweWak* watch from a distance
opening their doorways
too far away
across the blue of waters
lodge stands
sacred *IsKweWak* spirit home
*InNiNeWak IsKweWak*
all ages standing together
holding each other’s hands
heads lowered
chanting
praying
singing to me

fear explodes from within
anxiety
were they always there?
at the sacred home?
waiting
watching me

lifting my eyes to the sky spirits
clouds still
home rocks back and forth
leather flap bursts open
steam escapes
meeting the cool air
from the darkness
naked IsKweWak crawls out
legs strong
black loose hair
covering
brownness
slick with sweat
eyes lifted

spirit name whispered
confused I listen
Ancestors speaking
through the tree spirits
inside the bush of the swamps

I am forced by their love to look forward
IsKweWak fade away
No! MoNa! No!
I slam back into the pile of skin
all the memories of this life remind me of who I am
gasping for air
I cry
I feel lost again

I stop
I listen
I open my heart
I hear them
they still sing for me
they still pray for me
they are still there for me
In the first chapter of this study, I wrote about an enquiry regarding positionality and as mentioned previously, my purpose was not to presume I could fully understand, or assume to grasp Indigenous documentary theory in its entirety. As shown, my goal was to further develop my understanding of Indigenous documentary theory and practice. My research commenced years ago, when I was in graduate school, and later, queries regarding Indigeneity developed while working in the industry. Researching and writing this dissertation has been an act of personal, academic and professional reconciliation. Today, I find myself at an interesting place, I am working to balance my cultural values and principles with a colonial educational system, but with that stated, my practice includes the acknowledgement and esteemed regard for an InNiNeWak framework.

It was important for me to find ways to include my InNiNeWak knowledge system in this research and not be overwhelmed by western knowledge systems. My study has shifted the way I understand Indigenous documentary theory and practice as a whole, and I have acquired a profound appreciation for the diversity of documentary platforms and approaches. Further reflections were achieved and helped establish a comprehensive understanding to offer guidance and support for emerging Indigenous documentarians. Overall, the complexity of my content relating to Indigeneity, and provided in this dissertation could be perceived as contributing to the overall study of documentary.

My concluding chapter provides of an overview of the dissertation and the concerns that arose during my study, particularly when I came to fully comprehend the significance of Indigenizing documentary. However, I remained receptive and enthusiastic to question my assumptions, and ideally, when I engaged with other Indigenous documentarians. As a documentarian, my goal was to unearth meaningful ways to challenge traditional documentary
discourse. My hope is that my pedagogical framework MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit will encourage others in this field to employ respectful practices and methodologies when approaching Indigenous story.

Further, I will provide a brief summary of my research throughout, discussing my esteemed respect for my InNiNeWak values, principles and protocols, which provided an ethical protocol and framework that guided my dissertation. My emphasis toward my InNiNeWak ways of life and ethos rooted me during this academic journey. For this final chapter, I have sectioned it off into six parts, the first will discuss Unearthing as Metaphor, the second section will summarize the Significance of Dissertation to Theory, the third will provide a Summary of Research, the fourth section will discuss the Limitations of Study, the fifth part will discuss Suggestions for Further Research, and lastly, the sixth section will provide the Final Thoughts and conclusion.

7.1 Unearthing as Metaphor

The InNiNeWak framework of MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit builds upon a body of existing research that explores the role of Indigenous cultural experiences, and Indigeneity in documentary practices, and furthermore, how that leads to the development of concepts of story, protocols and our understanding of Indigenous identity as it relates to sharing story. It advances my framework as a practice model in academia, but it is much more than a model to be dissected: it is a way of life for the InNiNeWak. My framework is designed to engage with how our identity as Indigenous documentarians requires an extensive exploration of how positionality, modality, creative range, and experience influence our approaches and methodologies. This dissertation addresses how Indigeneity permits a comprehensive understanding of narrative, as well as how we approach our stories contrarily to documentarians
from outside our communities. Furthermore, my study explores how Indigenous identity shapes our creative process as we engage with core concepts, themes, and forms within the practice of documentary. The research involves *MoshKeKo AsKi InNiNeWak* systems of knowledge, which were respectfully engaged to help develop a theory to better understand documentary sovereignty, the protection of our stories from exploit. In positioning myself as both an *InNiNew IsKwew* researcher and as a documentarian, I recognize that my knowledge and expertise as a documentarian has been both shaped and interrupted by colonialism. My *InNiNeWak* relations and cultural teachings inform and enhance my documentary practice and how I approach the storytelling process.

*MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit* has framed this dissertation, and as demonstrated in my documentaries outlined in the *Inward Findings* chapter. During the research process, my framework has become more refined, and with the support of Indigenous documentary theory, protocol, and practices, it has added to my understanding. By researching the relationship between Indigenous ways of knowing and documentary practice, I have developed a deeper comprehension of how the Indigenous epistemological approach to story is fundamental in understanding how documentary informs theory and practice. I have concluded that Indigenous documentarians are now a significant starting point to understanding Indigenous his/their/herstories and contemporary realities, offering a necessary reference point and addressing the importance of positioning ourselves as a methodological approach. By declaring my identity as an *InNiNew* documentarian, I not only align myself with the growing number of Indigenous documentarians across Turtle Island, but I also acknowledge my existing scholarship concerning Indigenous documentary.
For the most part, I work independently, and I produce documentary with an Indigenous audience in mind. My expertise and experience in the field of documentary has strengthened my analysis of Indigenous documentary, and I wholeheartedly understand that story – via Indigenous documentary – has the power to shift perceptions. My decolonized approach to my research and to documentary practice and theory includes exploring the intersection of Indigenous identity, cultural resurgence, and resistance. Documentary by Indigenous documentarians offer a space for analysis and creation of processes mediated by Indigenous story. My study has reflected on protocols and respectful ways to engage with Indigenous community, ceremony, and of course, our stories.

By using the framework of MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit I have committed to deepen my thought process in terms of speaking to how Indigenous story, and identities are interwoven. For example, I mapped out how our engagements with each other and to our spirit – truth – stories are tied to place, cultural knowledge and rooted in our their/his/herstories. My InNiNeWak teachings remind me that my values, principles, ways of knowing, and my relationships with my Elders and Knowledge Keeper are my guides. When sharing story, I am affirming our right to unearth story, elaborate, sustain and transmit our knowledge systems in all of our respective disciplines. Knowledge systems are essential for our continued resistance, well-being, and our survivance. Our Indigenous knowledge systems can contribute to our overall wellness, and this is the reason why I engage with the stories I do – to create positive change.

7.2 Significance of Dissertation to Theory

My research question focuses on positionality and how it might become a framework through which documentarians may perhaps integrate into their own practice. For me, being
raised by my InNiNeWak community has influenced my ethos and also the way I express myself. My framework and now my pedagogical model MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit will encourage those interested in working with our stories to reconsider their relationships. The model includes seeking support and guidance from community members, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers, all the while being respectful of protocols and community practices. It has been emphasized throughout this dissertation that relationship building is integral to discussions relating to my research question. I discussed how Indigenous documentarians carry the knowledge to address how our lives can be respectfully and appropriately represented in documentary. To that end, my research addressed the following question: How does our positionality as Indigenous documentarians shape our creativity and the concepts, themes, and forms explored in the works we produce? In addressing this central research question, I have respected my creative practice and expertise as a documentarian. There is a collective need to address our relationship to story and provide a clear intent when working with Indigenous community. The role of the Indigenous documentarian is to build respectful relationships and to sustain cultural knowledge.

One of the goals of this research was to contribute to existing scholarship regarding Indigenous documentary and to also disrupt colonial documentary theory. My dissertation supports the ongoing redefining of the ever-growing scholarship on Indigenous documentary. By contributing to the collective journey of Indigenous documentarians, we (re)position ourselves as the authority. My research demonstrates that our Indigenous knowledge systems are diverse and dynamic, and as new knowledge is continuously introduced, we have adapted external knowledge and technology to suit our practice. As demonstrated throughout this study, Indigenous knowledge documentary practices are vast, innovative, and complex. Furthermore,
my research has allowed me to make visible the way culture is understood through the camera within the parameters of documentary – Indigenous documentarians record individual and collective stories deriving from community, framing and sharing Indigenous stories with the world. We are obliged to be accountable and responsible to the story because these are our relationships.

_MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit_ has uncovered how the work of Indigenous documentarians supports and builds upon our connection to community, and of course to our stories, and furthermore, how we choose to engage with them. My study has focused on incorporating Indigenous knowledge systems in the development of documentary. Cultural knowledge refers to the local knowledge existing within a particular connection to Ancestral lands, therefore this study is dedicated to those in my community who struggle with navigating the colonial education system, and this dissertation works as a statement that we will continue to privilege Indigenous voices. My theoretical framework allowed me to investigate methodological problems that we documentarians encounter in our practice, and by applying my framework to my dissertation process, I allowed myself to fully investigate how paradigms, based on our worldview, are entrenched in our Indigeneity.

My research and documentary practice combine empowerment and a construction in a very complex form of resistance. As discussed in this study, the strategies of sharing Indigenous knowledge have established a synergy of meaning for the viewer/listener. The idea is to construct documentary platforms that honours Indigeneity, and this process is fundamental for creating meaningful engagements and change in the world. Documentarians are challenging the colonial discourses within documentary by paying respect to place, and our knowledge systems which are informed by our Ancestral lands.
Our stories have been labeled and diminished as supernatural, mythological or folklore. Therefore, we have faced problematic interpretations of our stories, and we are still living with these mainstream misrepresentations today. Needless to say, I acknowledge that our allies are working towards decolonizing the self, but this action is prompted by the work of Indigenous activists, educators, protectors, documentarians, storytellers and others, by forcing them to look at their own colonial histories. When we look back and examine the work of Indigenous documentarians, we are reminded to acknowledge their journey’s, which paved a way for us, the next generation. Indigenous documentarians such as Alanis Obomsawin, Gil Cardinal, Loretta Todd, and Willie Dunn carved a space for us, addressing how documentarians could perhaps continue to incorporate protocol, responsibility, and respect into our documentary practice.

Additionally, my research discusses the importance of understanding how Indigenous research paradigms and theoretical frameworks support the development of our own methodologies as practitioners. Indigenous scholars are instrumental in shifting how we look at Indigenous storytelling, and research methodologies. Because of their work, we have started to move away from colonial frameworks to focus more on Indigenous approaches to research and documentary. In turn, we respectfully started rooting ourselves in our own Indigenous knowledge systems, both further developing, and in some cases reclaiming critical Indigenous theories and practice.

My study reflects on the current shift in documentary methodologies. The traditional documentary filmic approach was solemnly intended to record facets of real life for the purposes of institutional education and collecting historical evidence. Yet, from the beginning, we have cleared our own path, one that centres Indigenous story. The early documentaries of the 1900s are culpable in (re)producing colonial discourses, and of course, responsible for spreading the idea of Indigenous
peoples as the vanishing other (Columpar, 2010), in which the idea predates cinema, but cinema
certainly helped disseminate it. The most compelling aspect of Indigenous stories is that they are about
us as a people; they speak to our struggles, his/their/herstories and to our resilience. Battiste (2000)
reminds us that “Indigenous knowledge represents the protection and preservation of Indigenous
humanity” (507). Fundamentally, the stories we tell humanize the Indigenous experience, and
Indigenous documentarians are sustaining and protecting story.

Stories bind us together, creating a necessary space to grieve, provoke, and/or celebrate – the
story itself becomes a catalyst to sustain our cohesiveness as a people. Hence, as outlined in this
research, orality is vital to understanding Indigenous documentary, and how we experience truth,
convey experience, communicate, and laugh. “Story making in this instant becomes the language of
experience, sensation, history, and imagination” (Singer 2001 p. 3). Indigenous documentary carries
the power to awaken the spirit, where creating personal and collective meaning, in turn, rouses us into
action, for instance as in the case with Alanis Obomsawin and Tasha Hubbard to name a few.
Documentarians have evoked hope, potential, (re)affirmation, and most importantly, possibility and
futurity. Indigenous documentary is much more than a record, it is a creative means to shape
consciousness.

MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit as a research study sheds light on how
documentary can capture the gesture, syntax, and nuances of its recorded subjects within a
landscape of a specific time and place. Our diverse viewership will always bring to the forefront
new responses, analysis, and understanding. Viewer responses are based on their lived
experience, and therefore, documentary will continue to transcend time and space, quite similar
to orality. “Storytellers are highly valued because they have the power heal the spirit” (Singer
2001 p. 3). Documentary is a powerful medium because it encapsulates the spirits of pre-emptive
subjects – *living beings* – embodying them in the recording. This capturing and honouring of *spirit* is what motivates my work as a documentarian. I knowingly navigate and negotiate space within an ecosystem of seemingly disparate ways of being, dominant narratives and the like, so to come to understand one’s self as an Indigenous documentarian carries a lot of responsibility. We are not only accountable to the *subject*, but to the Knowledge Keepers and Elders in our communities, and to our Ancestors, and to all our relations and to our respective community members.

My research highlights the influence of documentary, it embodies the wealth and diversity of Indigenous voices, and it carries the power to reconcile, restore and heal. Cultural ways of being are sustained through the knowledge reciprocity of *storyteller/listener* and this exchange of story is entrenched in the principles of oral tradition. Archibald (2012) reminds us that “…sources of fundamental and important Indigenous knowledge are the land, our spiritual beliefs and ceremonies, traditional teachings of the Elders, dreams, and our stories” (p. 42). Indigenous documentarians have *ourselves* appropriated technology; we have transformed western media to assist not only in our own cultural, social and political action of resistance, but also as a means respectfully disseminate knowledge.

My methodology is embodied in the writing of this dissertation; encompassing methodologies when sharing *PoWaMeWin* and cultural stories. I have discussed the significance of incorporating Indigenous principles and values when working with Indigenous story. In the current environment of documentary, it is also important to acknowledge that there are several emerging new Indigenous documentarians, and with this emergence more diverse and innovative ideas and practices will arise. Our methodologies as documentarians are an important facet to our diverse practices, and we need to incorporate them into our work to ensure we are respectful,
accountable, and responsible. There is a significant effect when reversing the shots, while also appreciating the complexity of Indigenous stories. Documentary modifies the relationship between camera and subject. We have not only moved to the space behind the camera, but also remained in front of the lens asserting ourselves as the authority in our stories. We have certainly confronted the ethnographic gaze, responding to otherness by dismantling colonial tropes, we provide a counter-narrative to western history, inviting settler audiences to re-evaluate their preconceived cultural assumptions, and to reconsider the colonial superiority of speaking for us. We have asserted ourselves as the authority of Indigenous story, and this comes with hope and possibility, but also accountability and responsibility – it is a reciprocal approach and methodology that includes not just the documentarian, but the community.

7.3. Summary of Research

During the course of developing my framework, I examined how our positionality as Indigenous documentarians shape Indigenous documentary practices, specifically as it relates to sharing our stories in a public and community forum. My research drew upon and embodied an InNiNeWak knowledge system, where the word unearth symbolizes an action and speaks to the belief that our stories are still with us, protected within our lands, as well as our collective memories. My theoretical framework was shaped by InNiNeWak concepts, and transformed into an interaction of theory, which is rooted in my cultural understanding of documentary as a storytelling platform. Documentary sustains and validates Indigenous ways of being, and it is the central focus of Indigenous ethos and epistemologies.

Regarding the Outward Findings, the insightful responses to the interview questions revealed significant themes. The opportunities to engage were at the source of much reflection for participants. Indigeneity was central to many of their responses, including the affirmation that
positionality inspires creative choices and methodologies. They held that Indigenous documentary can be a practice that sustains Indigenous knowledge, supports community wellness, and nurtures relations. The value of creating time for them to process knowledge and reflect was emphasized, as well as how identity might foster change in the documentary industry. Participants participated, in their own way, in creating relationship, and evidence the significance of incorporating Indigenous voices of survival, and resiliency into the documentary sphere. Another key concern was the need to consistent and sustained acknowledgment of Indigenous voices in documentary.

*MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit* has uncovered how our stories strengthen our relationships, and most significantly how we are accountable and responsible to our communities and to the story itself. Using my framework as a research guide, I have addressed my research question, and I have uncovered how Indigenous documentary as a storytelling method has been exceptionally fitting for documentarians. There is no single narrative when it comes to Indigenous documentary practices because it includes working with collective stories. As a framework, *MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit* speaks to the importance of acknowledging from where our stories come from, and my story of unearthing begins with my foremothers. It also describes how we are obligated to treat Indigenous story as a *being*. Cultural protocols play an important role in our process as documentarians, and it is our work to ensure that we correct any misinformation before dissemination. It is necessary that we educate ourselves in our own knowledge systems before proceeding and declare our relationship to the *spirit* of the story we are sharing. This study asserts that documentarians are responsible and accountability to community, meaning employing protocol, and being responsible for our personal actions when telling the story.
The participants utilize a variety of platforms, for instance Dana Claxton’s media installation, Strong’s stop motion, and Coyes’s slow media. All demonstrating that we are decolonizing documentary by asserting our own voices – our truths in our practices. They are in the process of creating new knowledge systems and knowledge production by claiming an Indigenized lens. Their stories escape the confines of the colonial ethos, showing that there is and never has been a single way of telling a story – we agreed that the power lies with the documentarian who holds the camera. The participants agreed that Indigenous epistemologies and knowledge systems need to be valued, respected, and acknowledged – an acknowledgment that moved beyond superficial gestures and tokenism. Another concern that arose was to purposeful change documentary theory to include Indigenous storytelling methodologies and practice. Overall, participants agreed, there is a need to foster and recognize the relationship to the land, and counter colonial discourse with Indigenous story. Also, the responses provided me an insight and a deeper understanding into how to appropriately employ protocol and into the importance of declaring relationship to story.

In regard to the Inward Finding, the documentary work I have produced pays tribute to the resiliency of Indigenous people; it often touches on trauma, but also speaks to hope and futurity. My research has shown how Indigenous documentaries have countered settler-colonialism by generating self-representation that impedes colonial constructs and western paradigms. Furthermore, my thesis embodies the act of unearthing our ancient stories; many of my stories are inspired by dreams and conversations I have had with Knowledge Keepers and Elders. Storytelling is a powerful force that guides us through our lives, providing us support when we lose our way. Story is universal, and story carries agency. Story is spirit – I consider it a blessing to receive story from another place and time.
My approach to documentary often mixes observational and interview styles, as well as voiceover, for instance NiiSoTeWak and OshKiKiShiKaw both provide viewers with a contextualized account of the message being presented - the stories are personal and about InNiNeWak family values. My documentary work tends to focus on positive representation, and I provide community members an opportunity to speak for themselves. It is always cultural with roots in my InNiNeWak lived experience, and it carries meaning for me. However, I acknowledge that my documentary work is not for everyone, but I offer it as an alternative to mainstream representations. I tell stories to explore the experiences of others, and by honouring our own Indigenous documentary paradigms, I reject the notion of other. I, as a documentarian, speak for myself, and the stories I produce start to signify an extensive alterNative scheme that includes systemic change. My methodologies in relation to Indigenous story allows for a distinctive voice to advance meaningful engagement with community and to communicate and employ methods of reciprocity. Many themes emerge from my documentaries, more recently, I have focused on family values, and stories that our youth and children can engage with in a positive way. It is a multidimensional body of understanding involving action.

7.4 Limitations of Study

Limitations of this study include the need that there is still work to be done within academia to ensure that our diverse knowledge systems are acknowledged. This research is the beginning of further work in the documentary field, and perhaps for other Indigenous documentarians and scholars. Another limitation was the amount of time I had with fellow documentarians. I am grateful for their generosity of spirit, although I wish I had more time with them. The number of participants involved in this study who are all based in Canada, may also
be considered a limitation, but in the end, sharing with five (5) participants worked to my advantage in terms of time management.

I have worked in the industry for most of my adult life, so I am immersed in documentary, film, and television – I carry the same sentiments and understanding as the documentarians I interviewed. I may lack the objectivity that someone outside of the industry, even as an Indigenous person, might have when studying their profession. Also, one of the main facets of this study was to not only challenge colonial discourses, but to pay homage to the growing body of work by Indigenous documentarians. I did not have the time to fully delve into the body of work that exists.

Furthermore, my study was limited due to the paucity of publications from Indigenous scholars. Over the last several years I have engaged with a great deal of materials, but these were, for the most part, summaries, interpretations, and critiques of Indigenous film. I was not looking to explore summaries or critiques of documentaries, but rather how Indigenous documentarians engage with story. It was challenging to locate scholarship that was specific to Indigenous documentary; and I spent a lot of time researching Indigenous methodologies and protocols surrounding working with Indigenous story. This demonstrates a need for scholarship on Indigenous documentary theory and methodology.

7.5 Suggestions for Further Research

In consideration of possible future research that would extend the work of this dissertation, I offer the following potential research questions:

1. How might addressing Indigenous cultural rights enhance the practice of documentary theory and practice?
2. How might Indigenous frameworks be extended to the study of non-Indigenous documentarian working with Indigenous community?

3. How can decolonizing documentary challenge the paradigms of how documentary is studied and practiced?

4. How does the story of Nancy Colombia, an Inuk documentarian reframe the gendered male-centric settler colonial narrative-characterizing documentary as a whole?

5. How does a broader study consider Indigenous documentarians who are working outside of the settler state of Canada?

7.6 Final Thoughts

Overall, a strength of this research is that I come from a distinct cultural understanding of story, one that may be difficult for non-Indigenous scholars to engage with. When working on my analysis chapter, I found myself puzzled in terms of how to approach the statements of others. I was worried about accuracy in the retelling of participant narratives. Also, my study privileges my knowledge system within the theoretical framework of an Indigenous paradigm. Although my own Ancestral lands are located on the other side of these Indigenous lands, my research humbly took place here in Vancouver, British Columbia on the breathtaking and powerful Ancestral lands of the Coast Salish peoples. An inquiry process was set in an Indigenous research paradigm that privileges and upholds an InNiNeWak system of knowledge, one that I was born into and continue to be led by in all aspects of my life. The study also investigated how our diverse identities as Indigenous documentarians affect the treatment of Indigenous story, and therefore, affects and shifts the representation of our diverse lived experiences and perspectives.

Furthermore, in the realm of documentary discourse, I gathered knowledge from several Indigenous scholars from across Turtle Island, as well as intimate conversations with five (5)
Indigenous documentarians situated on the Ancestral lands that are now called Canada. My study determines and explores the modes and techniques Indigenous documentarians utilized to shape and promote the essence of documentary sovereignty, which is fundamental and essential in analyzing and understanding our methodologies and approaches in regard to Indigenous story. As Indigenous documentarians and I would argue as researchers, we are the guardians of our own stories, and should not be absent from stories about Indigenous peoples.

The main goal of my study *MooNaHaTihKaaSiWew / Unearthing Spirit* was to model a pedagogical framework that focused on an *InNiNeWak* knowledge system. My research focused on the significant presence of Indigenous documentarians in the field of documentary. Steps were taken to consult with Knowledge Keepers and Elders throughout my studies to ensure that I was respectful of protocols. I was also a learner on this journey and worked towards creating a space to reflect upon our relationships to community and story.

My development as a documentarian and now scholar is just the beginning of a new life journey. My commitment to the field of documentary runs deep and I am open to delve deeper into my own documentary process. My hope is that this research will have implications for further studies regarding Indigenous documentary, as it is a starting point for conversation. I have come to understand there is a need to further address Indigenous cultural property rights and how it relates to documentary theory practices. My study has also left me wondering about the comparative study of Indigenous and non-Indigenous documentary. There is opportunity to explore and compare documentary made in different industrial and cultural contexts worldwide. Further research can explore funding opportunities, viewership, and dissemination of Indigenous story, for example research on how Indigenous documentaries are produced and who the audience is for our films. Research could also expand on strategies of identifying options for
support and the enhancement of Indigenous documentary in Canada. It is an expansive topic that it deserves more in-depth research, looking at our Indigenous knowledge systems, languages and ways of life that are unique to a particular people.

My research demonstrates that decolonization is a necessary process for Indigenous documentarians to undergo and we do this by reclaiming ways of knowing and doing, and most importantly when we as documentarians highlight topics that are significant to an Indigenous audience. Moreover, there is an underlying eagerness to promote our knowledge systems, and it is through our documentary practice, we aim to protect our stories against Western epistemological power. At times, I become the guide for the viewer where I provide insights into inequality and challenge the audience to self-reflect, for instance as discussed in the Inward Findings chapter.

As an Indigenous documentarian myself, I seek to find balance with myself – the physical, mental, and spiritual parts of the self. Situating Indigenous paradigms first has created an opportunity for processing the act of storying. It requires rooting myself in my cultural knowledge first and foremost, hence why my research commences with my language InNiNiMoWin, which translates to the language of the human beings. When we speak to story and relationality, I believe our first teacher is the spirit realm and then the land we are born onto. I wrote this dissertation with the hopes that people in my community could engage with the methodological approach to documentary by Indigenous documentarians.

7.7 Conclusion

In closing, the University of British Columbia campus is situated on the Ancestral lands of the Coast Salish peoples, and was the home for this study. The strength of this study is the InNiNeWak cultural knowledge weaved through the dissertation. It is evident that Indigenous
documentarians are reframing the national collective memory of this place now called Canada. My research shows that there is a wealth of Indigenous stories and documentarians expressing creative and innovative ideas/truths/stories through the vast and flexible medium of documentary. In my theorizing, our stories signify transformation and decolonization. Indigenous stories embody cultural knowledge and lived experiences. This dissertation focused on how Indigenous documentarians play a significant role in the recovery and in the sustaining of the critical content that exists in our stories. Indigenous people have navigated through colonial despair and the damage has interrupted our intergenerational transmission of story and knowledge, yet we are actively working to reclaim and retell our stories for adjacent generations.

Indigenous documentarians have been consistently Indigenizing documentary for generations, either that be in front of the camera or from behind it as a key creative. In the year of 1992, we witnessed the establishment of the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN), a significant media platform for Indigenous storytellers. In the 1990s and the early 2000s also saw a growing number of Indigenous storytellers experimenting with technological platforms. Today, a new generation of Indigenous documentarians are sharing their truths, and some are even establishing their own production companies, such as Big Soul Productions, Rezolution Pictures and Eagle Vision to name a few. We are all, in a way, unearthing our own stories; we are creating our own platforms for sharing, in turn honouring the reciprocity to our relationships to story. One of the central features of the research was to uphold Indigenous methodologies and decolonize documentary. Taking the time to foster awareness of stories and cultural knowledge of the participants involved in this study, and the growing scholarship regarding Indigenous documentary was integral to understanding the significant influence of Indigenous documentary theory and practice.
On a personal note, I am committed to stay vigilant in disrupting power structures and narratives that erase Indigenous voices. Therefore, in circling back to the beginning, it is imperative for me to respectfully acknowledge, whom I believe, is the very first documentarian, an Inuk woman by the name of Nancy Columbia. Following protocol means that it is important to acknowledge the roots of documentary practice. I am shifting the colonial narrative and disrupting western scholarship of documentary theory. Also, in recognizing the work of Nancy Columbia, I am paying homage to her contribution to the study of documentary. Unfortunately, she remains in the margins, but my hope is to spark an alterNative story, and so, I deem it necessary for my dissertation to end by acknowledging Nancy Columbia’s journey as one of the first recognized Indigenous documentarians, reframing the gendered male-centric settler colonial narrative-characterizing documentary as a whole.
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