DAUGHTERS OF INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SURVIVORS: HEALING STORIES

by

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Abstract

The effects of Indian Residential Schools have been extremely detrimental to Indigenous communities, families and culture. There is a movement to document the stories of survivors of Residential Schools, recording their healing from the devastating effects. The intergenerational effects of the Schools have been documented to a lesser extent, and to an even lesser degree, the healing stories of children of survivors.

A goal of this research is to build upon the existing literature relating to Indigenous healing from the effects of Residential Schools, documenting intergenerational survival and healing. Furthermore, the intention is to explore Indigenous women's experiences and gain a greater understanding of their healing and wellness.

This research is a qualitative study of six Indigenous women who are daughters of Residential School survivors that identify as being engaged in a healing journey from the effects of the Schools. The women's healing stories were documented using Indigenous and Qualitative Description approaches that draw on the Oral History methodology. The implications of this research include additions to the existing literature relating to Indigenous healing and the potential for enhancement of current and developing healing programs, services and policy for Indigenous people. Furthermore, the implications for social work education include the importance for curriculum to include an Indigenous perspective and content that provides social workers with the tools necessary to work with First Nations people in a meaningful way.

The results of this study indicate that the six women were significantly impacted by Residential Schools. They are all working toward personal change and growth to alter some of the harmful intergenerational patterns in their families and communities. The five main effects from the Schools that were identified as being transmitted to the women are disconnection from Indigenous identity and heritage, parenting difficulties, living in silence, experiences of racism,
and compromised mental wellness. The main themes that emerged in relation to healing from these effects include gaining post-secondary education, learning about and connecting with Indigenous identity, attending therapy and healing programs, working towards forgiveness and understanding their parents’ experience in Residential School, changing family patterns, and being helpers in the community.
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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my beloved mom, Patricia Meseyton.

The profound impact she had on me is forever imbedded in my heart.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Historically, colonization of the Indigenous people in what is now known as North America proved to devastate whole Nations and their communities. Policies of assimilation led to the implementation of Indian Residential Schools, which have been destructive to generations of communities and families (Frideres, 1998). As the daughter of a Residential School survivor, the impact of this legacy has generated interest in the experience of other daughters of Residential School survivors. Furthermore, there is a need for the healing stories of daughters of Residential School survivors to be documented and validated. The literature pertaining to the intergenerational effects of Residential Schools is minimal, as is the literature relating to healing and wellness among intergenerational survivors of Residential Schools. After further illuminating the purpose of this research, I contextualize my ‘place’ in relation to the research by providing a brief account of my experience as a daughter of a Residential School survivor, followed by an overview of the chapters that follow. Ultimately, the results may be useful for practitioners working with Indigenous people, and provide the potential to advocate for social change and reform within policy and education.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the intergenerational impacts of Indian Residential Schools and discover how Indigenous women are healing from them and engaging in a process of healing. Furthermore, the purpose is to document and gain insight into the healing stories shared by the participants in this study. There is a reasonable body of literature that examines the impacts of Residential Schools on survivors, but limited information pertaining to
the intergenerational effects of these Schools and healing the subsequent generations. First Nations women that have been intergenerationally impacted by Residential Schools need to be validated for their courage to heal and be able to tell their stories. Therefore, this study is an opportunity for some of those stories of pain, suffering and healing to be shared. The terms First Nations and Indigenous are used interchangeably throughout this manuscript to avoid redundancy. The term First Nations refers to people who have ancestry to the first people of North America, as does the term Indigenous. A person who defines herself or himself in these terms may be a status Indian, non-status Indian, Inuit or Métis. Both terms are recognized in the Indigenous community as a political statement of resistance to colonial terms and definitions, such as Aboriginal or Indian. The fact that the term Indian refers to a person who is registered in Canada under Indian Act policy is used to highlight colonial imposition (Frideres, 1998).

Many First Nations people are working through a process of reclaiming what has been displaced due to colonialism and institutions such as Indian Residential Schools. Residential Schools were institutionalized by the Canadian government and churches with the goal of assimilating Indigenous people and eradicating their culture, values and beliefs. This institutionalization was set out in Indian Act policy by the government as a means to assimilate Indian people into the “civilized” white society (Frideres, 1998; Fournier & Crey, 1997). It is important to note that the use of the term colonization is not meant to be used in the abstract sense. The meaning behind this term for Indigenous people is charged with intense emotions that are ongoing and difficult to reconcile. Colonization continues today, as does the marginalization and oppression of First Nations people. Therefore there is a need to make explicit that colonization is very real for Indigenous people and something to be contended with on a daily basis as it represents so much loss and despair. Furthermore, experiences of racism compound and reinforce that this legacy exists and is perpetuated in society.
There is also a movement for First Nations to tell their stories about their experiences in Residential Schools. These same people are also sharing their processes for healing from the traumas they experienced at the hands of the churches and the State. Therefore, I assert that this study is a worthy contribution to this movement, as it is unique.

This study focusses specifically on the experiences of First Nations women. The healing experiences of men and women have similar aspects, but they are also distinct. I chose to study women only because I believe that men and women each have their own unique history in relation to colonization. For example, historically women’s roles were systemically attacked and broken down as women were seen as a barrier to the civilization agenda because they held considerable power and authority in their communities (Bourgeault, 1988; Frideres, 1998). Therefore, I believe Indigenous women’s and men’s experiences of healing need to be examined in separate studies with a research design that meets the needs of the group being studied.

Six Indigenous women were interviewed for this study. They shared their life histories and reflected on how they have been affected by Residential Schools. Additionally, they shared stories about healing and reconciling the effects they experienced from having a parent who survived attending Residential School. The stories are a testament to the strength and resiliency of First Nations women and how even after much pain and suffering, they can search for the positive, learn from their experiences and become helpers to their community members. An Indigenous approach (Tuhiwai Smith, 2004; Tuhiwai Te Rina Smith, 2000; Faircloth, 2004; Crazy Bull, 2004) and Qualitative Description methodology (Sandelowski, 2000) were used in this study. An Oral History methodology (Cruikshank, 1994; Slim & Thompson, 1995) was drawn upon in the research design as well. Analysis of the women’s stories was approached using a categorical-content analysis method (Sandelowski, 2000; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998).
The research questions posed enquire about specific healing processes and what strategies have been used to heal from the effects of Residential Schools. The research questions are as follows: What are the strategies that daughters of Indian Residential School survivors use to move towards healing from the intergenerational effects of the Schools? To what extent is reclaiming women's traditional Indigenous roles related to the healing process?

The purpose of this study in relation to social work is to enhance and develop current and developing programs, services and policy for First Nations people. I anticipate that the results of this study will be able to be used by First Nations and non-First Nations social workers to further develop practice with Indigenous people and better meet their clients' needs as they move along their healing journeys. Additionally, this study is relevant to social work practice as it promotes social work values such as social justice and supporting community change. This study acknowledges the injustices that First Nations people have suffered, in particular the Residential School legacy. It also acknowledges the impacts of this legacy and examines the means by which community change and healing can occur. Furthermore, this study contributes tools and resources that can be used by those engaging in a healing process and those practicing social work with First Nations women. The results of this thesis may be relevant in practice settings where there is significant overrepresentation of Indigenous people such as in child welfare, corrections and addictions. Finally, this research can be disseminated as a means to influence and advocate for policy change to better meet the needs of First Nations people, such as by changing curriculum in public schools to reflect an accurate portrayal of the history of Indigenous people.

**Personal Account of Author**

I am a First Nations woman from the Fisher River Cree Nation and Peguis First Nation, in Koostatak Manitoba. I have been actively engaged in my own process of healing and discovery
of my culture for the past ten years. My mother attended two Residential Schools in Manitoba and as a consequence experienced abuse, loss of identity, language and culture. In the past ten years or so, my mother began to speak about her experiences in the Schools and the abuse that she suffered. I believe at the time she began to feel she could begin to share her experiences and gave herself permission to begin exploring her feelings of shame and internalized racism about being Indian. When she began to tell her story, she started a process of learning about her First Nations identity and the teachings and practices of our Cree heritage.

As my mother began this process, it was as if I had permission at the age of seventeen or eighteen to begin my own healing and learning journey. I had my own feelings of internalized racism with feelings of shame about being Indian. We had never openly talked about how we were First Nations and rarely traveled back to Manitoba to our homeland. My childhood was mostly void of nurturing and physical affection from my mother. We both lived in silence and neither of us had the tools to share or express emotions and feelings until I became an adult. Today we are working towards gaining a sense of closeness and intimacy, although it remains a struggle that we are trying to overcome.

My healing journey began when I started to learn in college about the history of colonization forced upon First Nations people. Over the years, I have been engaging in a process that is characterized by decolonization and healing. I have been working towards deconstructing mainstream society’s values and beliefs and replacing them with those of my Indigenous culture. My process of healing has included learning traditional Anishnabe teachings, attending ceremonies, abstaining from drugs and alcohol, going to therapy and becoming actively involved in my community. I have been learning how to walk on the ‘Good Red Road’, as our people term living the teachings in everyday life. I have also been working as a helper in my community, supporting other people in taking healing steps in their own journeys.
My personal and cultural experience informs the purpose of this research. My goal was to document the experiences of other daughters of Residential School survivors. My approach to this research process is based on my traditional values and beliefs that stem from the Laws of the Pipe. Within this belief system there are seven sacred teachings: caring, sharing, love, honor, honesty, kindness and respect. I have been taught to walk with these values and beliefs in everyday life and in the work that I do as a social worker. I approach this research from this epistemology because previously First Nations people have been subjected to mistreatment by Western researchers. In addition, I cannot separate my personal beliefs from this process and be true to the teachings that I hold. This means ‘walking my talk’. It is my belief that this study has been approached from a place of honor and respect. The process has truly been meaningful for me and as a result I have met and come to know six very wonderful women. It has been a privilege to be witness to their healing stories and to present them in this manuscript.

After completing this work, I have a greater knowledge and understanding of the healing processes and struggles of Indigenous women. I discovered that my personal experience of healing has many similarities to the experiences of the six women interviewed in this study. I learned a great deal also about the worth and meaning of conducting Indigenous research. I take away profound admiration for the women and inspiration to continue this research and ensure that it reaches a wider audience. The women told me that I need to publish this research and that they felt other women who are struggling with healing would benefit from reading the content of this manuscript. Therefore, I have both an obligation and the privilege to follow through with this request.
Overview of Study

Chapter one provides an introduction to the topic of healing from the effects of Indian Residential Schools. It also presents the purpose and rationale for this research. I suggest that the voices of Indigenous women must be heard and there needs to be a space created for them to share their stories. The topic is introduced within the historical context of colonialism and briefly outlines the impact of institutions such as Indian Residential Schools. The implications of this research for social work policy, practice and education are also presented. I also include a personal account of myself and describe how my experience of being a daughter of a Residential School survivor inspired me to have an interest in this topic.

Chapter two provides background on the history of colonization that Indigenous people in North America have endured for the past five hundred years. Colonial policy sought to systemically dismantle and destroy Indigenous culture and kinship systems and to gain control of the people and the land, in addition to implementing an assimilation agenda. Furthermore, the intent of Indian Residential Schools was to put the assimilation policy into action and further destroy First Nations people’s identity and culture (Frideres, 1998). The historical legacy and aftermath of Residential Schools is evidenced by the horrific accounts of students’ experiences in the Schools. In addition, Residential Schools have had devastating effects on the children of survivors and continue to have a negative impact on Indigenous communities (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2003; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996, Chrisjohn, Young & Maraun, 2002; Fournier & Crey, 1997). Internalized racism is an effect of Residential Schools as a result of racist policies and treatment of the children who were forced to attend (Duran & Duran, 1995).

Chapter three is a review of the literature on Indigenous healing. First, I review healing literature relating to the intergenerational effects of Residential Schools. This review shows that healing is a process that has many components such as having a connection to culture and ceremony, grieving and recovering from the aftermath of Residential Schools (Aboriginal
Corrections Policy Unit, 2002; Sterling, 2002; Ing, 2000, Anderson, 2000). Second, I describe and provide an analysis of the literature on decolonization. The literature states that decolonization is a process of consciousness-raising and transformation that involves reconstructing one's epistemology (Tuhiwai Smith, 2004; Hingley, 2000; Laenui & Burgess, 2000). Third, I present literature on Indigenous Medicine Wheel teachings. These teachings are useful when speaking about First Nations healing and wellness as the topic can be presented in a cultural context that reflects Indigenous values and beliefs (Hart, 2002; Dick, 1998; Graveline, 1998; Bruyere, 1999).

Chapter four provides a description of and rationale for the approaches and methods that guided this study. Fundamentally, an Indigenous Approach was utilized in the design of this research. First Nations people have historically had negative experiences with non-Indigenous researchers; therefore there is a need to conduct this study in a culturally relevant way that includes ceremony and cultural protocols (Tuhiwai Te Rina Smith, 2000; Tuhiwai Smith, 2004; Faircloth, 2004). Furthermore, a Qualitative Description method was utilized as it seeks to honor the stories of participants in their own words and minimally interprets them (Sandelowski, 2000). An Oral History methodology was also utilized in this research as it seeks to validate people's stories over their lifespan (Cruikshank, 1994; Slim & Thompson, 1995). In addition to elaborating on and providing a rationale for the research design, the discussion also includes the analytical method being utilized, which is a content analysis approach (Sandelowski, 2000; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998). The main rationale for the research design relates to the need to include participants as co-researchers and have meaningful interactions with each of them. Finally, the ethical and validity considerations that I took into account throughout the duration of the study include verification, participant distress, reflexivity, and loyalty (Maxwell, 1996).
Chapter five includes the results of this study. First, a description of the six storytellers is presented. Second, the storytellers' understanding of their parents' experiences in Residential School is discussed. Third, I illustrate the five main effects from Residential Schools that were identified as being transmitted to the storytellers; these include disconnection from Indigenous identity and heritage, parenting difficulties, living in silence, experiences of racism, and compromised mental wellness. Fourth, I describe the six themes that emerged in relation to healing from intergenerational effects. These include gaining post-secondary education, learning about and connecting with Indigenous identity, attending therapy and healing programs, working towards forgiveness and understanding their parents' experience in Residential School, changing family patterns, and being helpers in the community.

Chapter six is a discussion of the healing stories in terms of Anishnabe Medicine Wheel teachings, as there is a need to view healing and wellness from a holistic perspective (Sterling, 2002). Furthermore, healing takes time and is a process of peeling away layers of pain and sorrow and shifting negative experiences into a positive light. In relating the findings to the literature reviewed in chapter three on healing and decolonization, this study validates and enhances the existing literature on this topic. In addition, I reiterate the research questions posed and speak to how I have come to understand the six storytellers' steps taken towards healing and their roles in their communities as helpers.

Finally, in chapter seven I describe the limitations and validity of this study. The use of reflexivity throughout the research process has been useful in balancing my multiple roles in this study and the outcomes (Maxwell, 1996). In addition, the heavy influence of my Indigenous epistemology enhances this research and adds meaning to it, rather than making it subjective and biased. The implications of the research suggest that it may be useful for influencing social work practice and education, along with the potential to make policy and social change that would benefit Indigenous people. In reviewing the results of this study, the conclusion arrived at is that
healing involves peeling layers and is an individual process that takes time. Lastly, closing thoughts on healing and wellness in the words of the storytellers' honors the wisdom of their voices and experience.

**Summary**

This introductory chapter describes the purpose and rationale for this research study, which are to document healing stories of daughters of Indian Residential School survivors and add to the existing literature on healing. This chapter offers a brief introduction to the topic, situating it within the context of the legacy of Residential Schools and other colonial policies. I also situate myself in relation to the topic and how I came about seeing the need for this research. The purpose of this research in relation to social work practice, education and social policy is also introduced. This chapter also provides an overview of the contents of this manuscript. The next chapter provides an in depth discussion on the historical context of colonialism and Indian Residential Schools, along with the intent and aftermath. A review of the literature pertaining to the intergenerational effects and healing from the impacts of Residential Schools is not complete without situating this research within this context of colonization.
Chapter 2: Colonization and Indian Residential Schools

Introduction

The previous chapter includes an introduction to the purpose and rationale for this study, making explicit my personal connection to the topic. Additionally, chapter one introduces the topic in relation to its implications for social work, education and policy reform. I turn to provide a description of the historical context of the colonization of Indigenous people in North America. It would be very difficult to gain an understanding of this topic and research without situating it within the historical context. I describe the intended goals of colonization, which were to weaken and take control over First Nations people and their lands. This took place by seeking to destroy Indigenous cultures, languages and kinship systems. An assimilation agenda was also adopted by colonial powers. This was legislated through Indian Act policy and carried out through institutions such as Indian Residential Schools (Frideres, 1998). A description of the history and intent of Indian Residential Schools is also provided. I describe survivors' experiences in the Schools, depicting racist and brutal acts perpetrated on children by School officials (Chrisjohn, Young & Maraun, 2002; Fournier & Crey, 1997). Furthermore, I review literature on the intergenerational effects of Residential Schools, illustrating how the impacts continue to be felt in Indigenous communities today. The literature shows that children and grandchildren of Residential School survivors have been impacted in many cases as much as those who attended (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996; Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2003). I further present literature on internalized racism, as this is an effect of Residential Schools that is problematic amongst First Nations people and communities, causing intergenerational effects to be further perpetuated (Duran & Duran, 1995).
History of Colonization

According to Bourgeault (1988), prior to the colonization of First Nations people in what is now known as North America, Indigenous people lived communally in hunting and gathering societies. Men and women in pre-contact times lived in harmony with each other and there was a mutual exchange among community members. Indigenous women had considerable control over their lives and within the community and they were respected because other community members depended on them. Pre-contact Indigenous communities were egalitarian and functioned as a whole (Bourgeault, 1988).

Colonial policies and laws set out to systemically destroy pre-contact Indigenous societies. This process was legitimated through the establishment of the Indian Act and treaties, both of which claimed complete control and domination over Indian people and communities (Frideres, 1988). Frideres (1998) asserts that the goal of colonization was to weaken First Nations. This weakening would then create dependency on the state and subsequently, Indigenous people could be controlled and the capitalist agenda could prevail. Additionally, Frideres (1998) states the “underlying basis of characterizing Aboriginal-White relations in our history is that Europeans have always assumed a superiority over Aboriginal people” (p. 9). This premise of superiority was and continues today to be predicated on the basis of racism.

The destruction of Indigenous cultures was strategic. According to Mullaly (2002), culture can be defined as “a common set of values and norms, including shared patterns of seeing, thinking, and acting, that a group holds” (p. 71). The state needed to break down these egalitarian societies. This provided the means to assert full control over Indigenous people, thereby reducing any barriers to the theft of the land, and to social and economic control. The next phase of the colonization process included implementing the assimilation agenda. Webster’s Dictionary (1996) defines assimilation as a means “to bring into conformity with the customs and traditions
of a dominant culture" (p. 39). Mullaly (2002) adds to this definition with the assertion that there is the false assurance that there will be an improved life after assimilation.

Frideres (1998) describes how in Canada the colonization process took place in seven parts: 1) confining groups into geographical areas; 2) the destruction of social and cultural societies; 3) external political control; 4) the creation of economic dependence; 5) implementation of inadequate social services; 6) the segregation of differing groups; and 7) racism (1998, pp. 3-7).

**History of Indian Residential Schools**

Indian Residential Schools began in Canada in the 1870's and the last school was closed in the early 1980's: a total of ninety years of forced assimilation. Indian children were removed from their homes and communities, as enforced by law. The Schools were operated primarily by Anglican and Catholic churches and were given their legislative mandate by the Canadian government. The *Indian Act* made it legal to force the children into the Schools and to carry out the goals of assimilation. The objective of the Schools was to eradicate and destroy Indigenous cultures, replacing them with the culture of the dominant Western society (Chrisjohn, Young & Maraun, 2002). Chrisjohn et al. (2002), highlight a public statement made about the "Indian problem" and assimilation policy: "Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian department and that is the whole object of this Bill" (p. 42). Fournier and Crey (1997) elaborate on this notion and assert that the Canadian government and the churches joined to implement the Schools, thereby getting rid of the "Indian problem" while at the same time "the churches could harvest souls" (pp. 53-54). Truant officers and police enforced the laws and Indian parents who refused to send their children to the Schools were punished by law, and food
was often withheld by officials in times of famine and epidemics as a coercive means to have children released to the Schools (Fournier & Crey, 1997).

Fournier and Crey (1997) state that in 1904 it was reported that children in Residential Schools had a national death rate of 24% and this would have been increased to 42% if the children who were sent home to die were counted. Residential Schools have been described as "internment camps for Indian children", where punishment and violence were prevalent at the hands of School officials (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p. 49). Whippings and/or confinement for extended periods took place if children spoke their languages or engaged in any demonstration of their Indigenous heritage (Fournier & Crey, 1997). Chrisjohn et al. (2002) also describe how beatings and the withholding of food took place as forms of punishment. There were many "instances of excessive abuse (sexual abuse has been documented, other extreme abuses hinted at), and these were handled by simple devices like relocating personnel, threatening victims or their families, or removing bureaucrats who insisted on doing their jobs properly" (p. 240). Other forms of abuse that have been documented include: "beating students into unconsciousness, sticking needles through students' tongues, breaking students' arms, legs, or ribs...", all of which are criminal acts that went unpunished and were concealed in many cases (Chrisjohn et al., 2002, p. 243). Upon returning home from Residential Schools, many survivors experienced post traumatic stress disorder, rage, addictions, suicide, violence, sexual problems and self-mutilation (Fournier & Crey, 1997).

Jo-Anne Fiske (1996) describes the impacts of the Lejac Residential School on Carrier women. Fiske describes how the Oblates at Lejac "considered the matrilineal kinship system of the Carrier (which entailed membership in one's mother's clan and succession to positions of rank held by her and her siblings) to be a degraded state..." (p. 171). The Oblates opposed Indigenous women being in positions of power and authority in communities. They sought to dismantle this system and replace it with one of patriarchal kinship (Fiske, 1996). Fiske further
describes how the Oblates and Sisters had no training as teachers and their duty was to provide a moral, religious and domestic education, not an academic one. Students at Lejac spent no more than two hours a day in the classroom; the rest was spent training the girls to be “future farm wives” (1996, p. 172). Girls were reported to have done massive amounts of sewing and other “domestic sciences” (Fiske, 1996).

**Intergenerational Effects of Residential Schools**

The *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People* (RCAP) (1996), states the effects of the Residential School system have devastated First Nations communities and continue to cause destruction today. It is further stated in the RCAP that survivors brought abuse into their communities upon return from Residential Schools. In many instances survivors inflicted abuse upon members of their own family, repeating what was done to them in the Schools. The RCAP identifies behaviors such as abuse and neglect as the direct result of the Residential School system. In addition, loss of cultural identity and traditional parenting skills are highlighted in the report as other prominent effects of the Schools. These factors have contributed greatly to issues such as self-destruction and violence in First Nations communities (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), 1996).

The report *Aboriginal People, Resilience and the Residential School Legacy* (APRRSL) (2003), suggests that family members of survivors, particularly their children, have experienced many effects from Residential Schools. The transmission of these effects to the subsequent generations is often referred to as the intergenerational effects of Residential Schools. The APRRSL further states that trauma has been passed on to the children of survivors, producing what is termed “intergenerational Survivors” (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2003, p. 51).

Like a pebble dropped in a pond, the effects of trauma tend to ripple outwards from victims to touch all those who surround them, whether parents, spouses, children or
friends. There is ample evidence to support this view among residential school Survivors, where the consequences of emotional, physical and sexual abuse continue to be felt in each subsequent generation. (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2003, p. 33)

The APRRSL report (2003) suggests that the children of survivors in many cases have been affected with the same amount of trauma as survivors, but without being forced into an institution. The APRRSL, further states that children of survivors are likely to have witnessed domestic violence in the home, as children in the Schools learned about power and control, rather than how to nurture and care for children. Many children of survivors experienced abuse and neglect by their parent(s) and many survivors were unable to express love or physical affection towards their children. For instance, many children of survivors were never hugged as children or given nurturing validation. Often when raised in this environment, children experienced a lack of feeling of self-worth, self-destruction; they inflicted violence on others, became addicted to drugs and/or alcohol and displayed other high-risk behaviors. These children may now have their own families and may have a propensity to inflict the same abuses they experienced on their own children, thereby perpetuating the legacy and effects of the Residential Schools (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2003).

The report *Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Among Aboriginal People in Canada: Review and Analysis of the Intergenerational Links to Residential Schools* (FASAAPC) (2003), states that the effects of Residential Schools will extend through another four to five generations. The prevalence of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is suggested to be an effect of the Schools, as a consequence of alcoholism in communities. Poor health among First Nations people due to poverty and sub-standard living conditions is also linked to Residential Schools. In the Schools, children had poor health, disease was rampant and they were malnourished. These factors of poor health have been transmitted into Indigenous communities, resulting in continued poverty, chronic health conditions, obesity and poor nutrition (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2003).
The FASAAPC (2003) report further highlights the prevalence of mental health issues as being a major problem in First Nations communities, also as a result of the Residential Schools. Mental health issues take the form of suicide, addictions, grief and loss and other psychiatric problems. It states in FASAAPC that, “Mental disorders, such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), are the most common mental disorders found in Aboriginal communities and, in some communities, are endemic” (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2003, p. 83, as cited in Kirmayer, Brass and Tait, 2000).

The FASAAPC (2003) speaks to the over-representation of First Nations in the child welfare system and family dysfunction. These concerns are argued to be linked to the effects of Residential Schools. However, the removal of First Nations children from their families and communities continues today at the hands of the child welfare system. This legacy began in the 1960’s, when an overwhelming number of Indigenous children were removed from their parents and adopted into non-First Nations homes. This period was so significant to the destruction of First Nations communities, that it has been termed “the Sixties Scoop”. The Sixties Scoop was another attempt by the Canadian government to assimilate First Nations children, thereby continuing the agenda of cultural destruction and control as set out in Indian Schooling Policy. Further separation from culture and community was the result of the Sixties Scoop, contributing to family dysfunction and cycles of abuse, violence and addiction (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2003).

The literature relating to the intergenerational effects of Residential Schools tends to adequately identify the issues and problems, but it does not adequately portray the lived experiences of children of survivors in their own words. The voices of Indigenous women tend to be missing in the literature; therefore, it lacks the meaning associated with personalizing the issues and telling people’s individual and collective stories. Additionally, the destruction of matrilineal kinship systems in First Nations communities has in many cases silenced women’s
ability to speak out. In a small way this study contributes to promoting the reclaiming of women’s voices and roles as leaders in their communities. It is my hope that the stories told in this study will contribute to this movement towards revitalizing tradition, as other Indigenous women may feel further inspired to become involved in promoting community change and wellness. Therefore, I assert that this study addresses this gap in the literature and enhances what exists.

**Internalized Racism**

Duran and Duran (1995) define the concept of internalized racism:

> Once a group of people have been assaulted in a genocidal fashion, there are psychological ramifications. With the victim’s complete loss of power comes despair, and the psyche reacts by internalizing what appears to be genuine power – the power of the oppressor. The internalizing process begins when Native American people internalize the oppressor, which is merely a caricature of the power actually taken from Native American people. At this point, self-worth of the individual and/or group has sunk to a level of despair tantamount to self-hatred. (p. 29)

Duran and Duran (1995) describe how the internalization of racism is a key factor in high suicide rates, mass consumption of substances and violence. People thus come to believe or internalize the racist stereotypes and attitudes about their people as true and valid. A complete lack of self-worth and self-efficacy are the result. When a person is immersed in this state, marginalization and vulnerability to further oppression may occur. This serves to further perpetuate social issues and dependency (Duran & Duran, 1995).

Residential Schools were among the many institutions that have contributed to the prevalence of internalized racism amongst First Nations people. They participated in the degradation of Indigenous cultures and tradition, the prohibition of speaking one’s language in
the Schools and the forced acceptance of Western religions. As a consequence, many First Nations people who survived Residential School were left without knowledge of their culture, tradition or language. This sense of being cultureless was also transmitted to the children and subsequent generations in many cases. Without a sense of pride and understanding of their Indigenous culture, many people internalize the racist stereotypes and beliefs about their people (Duran & Duran, 1995).

Duran and Duran (1995) make reference to the results of the Holocaust being similar to that of the historical experience of Native Americans, including intergenerational posttraumatic stress disorder. They highlight how the children of Residential School survivors have been affected as much as the survivors, a situation like that of the Holocaust survivors and their children. The internalization of racism is also discussed as a symptom of this intergenerational legacy (Duran & Duran, 1995).

The literature focusing on the internalization of racism by Indigenous people is scant. I assert that it requires further research and examination from the perspective of First Nations people, particularly women. The literature I reviewed did not contain the perspective or lived experience of Indigenous women. Many First Nations people carry a belief that they are worthless and their culture is bad, particularly people who live in urban areas and have had limited exposure to their teachings and traditions. In addition, experiencing racism day after day only serves to further reinforce these beliefs and perpetuate racist assumptions. This topic greatly needs further exploration and should include representation from women, men, Elders and young people. This study briefly examines this concept of internalization, but by no means contributes to the existing literature in the capacity that is needed.
Summary

This chapter describes the history of colonization, its intent and aftermath. This process was carried out through systemic attempts to destroy Indigenous cultures, assimilation policy and creating First Nations dependency on the State (Frideres, 1998). The history and goals of Indian Residential Schools are also outlined, describing the horrible experiences children endured and devastating effects on families and communities (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996; Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2003; Chrisjohn, Young & Maraun, 2002; Fournier & Crey, 1997)). This chapter also illustrates and provides an analysis of the literature relating to the intergenerational transmission of the effects of Residential Schools. I describe specific outcomes of the Schools, outlining the suffering that Indigenous communities have endured as a result (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996, Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2003). One of the major outcomes of Residential Schools is the internalization of racism, which contributes significantly to the perpetuation of the Residential School legacy (Duran & Duran, 1995). In the next chapter I present a review of the literature on First Nations healing, wellness and decolonization. Further to this, I discuss literature on Indigenous Medicine Wheel teachings and present their usefulness for understanding healing and wellness.
Chapter 3: Healing and Decolonization Literature

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I introduce the topic of this thesis by placing it within the historical context of colonization. Chapter three provides a review of the literature related to healing from the intergenerational effects of Residential School. The literature asserts that healing is a process that takes time to unfold as there is a change in identity and consciousness. This process is deemed to take place through learning about and participating in one’s culture, learning language, forgiving, and connecting to the land (Aboriginal Corrections Policy Unit, 2002; Sterling, 2002; Ing, 2000; Anderson, 2000). This chapter also includes a review of the literature on decolonization. This literature is similar to the healing literature, but is also distinct as it includes the need for an epistemology transformation that deconstructs a Western world view and replaces it with that of one’s Indigenous culture and beliefs (Tuhiwai Smith, 2004; Hingley, 2000; Laenui & Burgess, 2000). I also review literature on Medicine Wheel teachings and discuss their usefulness for understanding experiences of healing and identity due to its cultural relevance and importance, as it is a holistic approach which honors Indigenous world views (Hart, 2002; Dick, 1998; Graveline, 1998; Bruyere, 1999).

Healing the Effects of Residential Schools

The Aboriginal Corrections Policy Unit produced the Mapping the Healing Journey (2002) report. This report defines First Nations healing as encompassing the following: learning to live within the values and beliefs of one’s own culture, striving toward well-being and balance, recovery and wellness, taking time to heal and building a new lifestyle. A central principle
asserted in this report is that healing is decolonization. This report highlights an account about Indigenous healing from a participant in the project:

Healing is about being aligned with natural spiritual law. That alignment can happen swiftly, but the healing process itself seems to take along time. The major part of the unresolved suffering that needs to be healed actually belongs to the ancestors. By healing themselves, each generation heals their ancestors. “Being 'healed' means living in peace, living in acceptance and not judging anyone. Thus with the residential school experience, healing means to come fully into acceptance of what took place and fully forgiving everyone that was involved. The only way to resolve the pain that comes from living in the past is acceptance and forgiveness. I tried all different kinds of healing, but I didn’t feel like I was healed until I saw the things that had happened to me as a great gift.” (Sequoyah Trueblood, interview cited in Aboriginal Corrections Policy Unit, 2002, p. 14)

*Mapping the Healing Journey* (2002) outlines a four stage process in the individual Indigenous healing journey. Stage 1 is called “The Journey Begins” and is characterized by identifying that one wants to change one’s life. This can involve the telling of one’s personal story and a new Indigenous identity may begin to emerge. Stage 2 is termed “Partial Recovery” and involves uncovering of trauma and linking its effects to unhealthy behavior. A new vision of the self may emerge and a “culture of recovery replaces the culture of addictions” (2002, p. 60). Stage 3 is called “The Long Trail” and it revolves around the development of a new Indigenous identity. This stage may be a lengthy process for some and a new lifestyle may emerge. The final stage is termed “Transformation and Renewal” and is characterized by the individual transforming consciousness. In addition, many First Nations people begin to translate this expression into assisting with the development and healing of the community (Aboriginal Corrections Policy Unit, 2002).
In Lisa Sterling’s dissertation (2002), First Nations multigenerational (intergenerational) trauma and healing are examined. Sterling identifies seven key areas that are significant to healing multigenerational trauma: 1) Being who we are as Aboriginal people; 2) Healing through culture and cultural ceremonies; 3) Learning the language; 4) Practicing good parenting; 5) Forgiveness and grieving ceremonies; 6) Placing emphasis on the role of women in healing; and 7) Respect and reconnecting to the land (p. 127). The first part of healing involves accepting and embracing a collective Indigenous identity. This coincides with the second principle of healing through ceremonies and culture. Healing through culture is highlighted as being holistic and culturally appropriate. Learning the language is also identified as a primary attribute of healing, especially since it was forbidden and in some cases lost in Residential Schools. Healthy parenting is identified as a major part of healing processes, as poor parenting has been identified as one of the most devastating effects on the children of Residential School survivors. The next principle of forgiveness emphasizes grieving and forgiving wrongdoings, letting go of past hurts. Reclaiming women’s power and roles are identified as key ingredients in healing from multigenerational trauma. One participant in Sterling’s study stated:

Although native women have been the most overlooked or forgotten today, right now the native woman is moving at great strides in healing. I think the reason for this is very important for the future health and well-being of this earth. First the woman is the embodiment of the earth itself. The sign that the native woman is healing is a sign that the earth will begin healing as well. I believe that non-Aboriginal society has a lot to learn from Indigenous women. (2002, p. 142)

The final principle identified in Sterling’s study is that of connecting to mother earth. It discusses how connecting to the land is healing and nurturing (2002).

Rosalyn Ing (2000) in her dissertation explored the lived experiences of 2nd and 3rd generation Residential School survivors, which included stories of First Nations who attended
Residential School and stories of people who had a parent who attended them. The primary purpose of Ing's study was to explore how the ten survivors came to be successful in post-secondary education, despite having been impacted by Residential Schools. Ing discovered the following effects from Residential Schools as described by the 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} generation survivors: remaining silent and having a fear of sharing, shame, loss of identity, loss of language, difficulties with parenting, abuse, anger, low self-worth and difficulty dealing with emotions. Ing further discovered that post-secondary education was an avenue for the participants to learn about Residential School history and process this learning. Ing found that recovery from the intergenerational effects of Residential Schools included reclaiming culture, learning teachings and attending ceremonies, gaining an understanding of their families' experiences in Residential School, going through therapy and using their education to help people in their communities in some way. In her conclusion, Ing explicitly identified a further need for more research on this topic by First Nations people (2000).

In Kim Anderson's book, *A Recognition of being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood* (2000), she speaks about healing processes for Indigenous women. Healing and identity transformation, according to Anderson, are characterized broadly in four steps: resist, reclaim, construct and act (2000, p. 15). Anderson wrote this book to acknowledge and assist with healing the unique experiences of Indigenous women from the colonization process, particularly because the roles of women were systemically destroyed. Anderson quotes Maria Campbell on this destruction:

> When the colonizers started to break that circle down, one of the things that the missionaries saw was that the women were so strong. They couldn't quite understand what was happening, but they knew that if they moved the children out of the centre of the community, and removed them from the women and elders, they would win. (2000, p. 161)
Anderson (2000) asserts that Indigenous women need to assert their power as life givers, as is recognized in traditional ceremonies. This connects closely with reasserting the ideology of motherhood, which gives the responsibility of nurturing children to women. Anderson also suggests that First Nations women need to unlearn and deconstruct what they have been taught about motherhood from the dominant society: “If we can reclaim the Aboriginal ideology of motherhood, we can reclaim the power to make important decisions and restore the balance to our communities” (2000, p. 171). Anderson further articulates that there is also a need for a balance between males and females, as both are critical to the healing and growth of First Nations people and communities. A connection and respect for mother earth is also identified as a component to Indigenous healing. In addition, Anderson speaks of women needing to learn how to respect their bodies and see them as sacred (2000).

Anderson (2000) also writes about the distortion of Indigenous women’s views of intimacy and sexuality and how they must relearn how to love others and themselves. Another principle identified is gaining a sense of purpose, which can be achieved through the reclaiming of roles and contributing to the community. In order for Indigenous women to reclaim their political authority in communities, Anderson points to the need for women to nurture themselves, find their voice, help the men to heal and teach the younger generations about respect and leading a good life. These factors are highlighted as integral to the self-determination and healing of First Nations women (2000).

The healing literature reviewed in this section is prescriptive and informative. I believe in some cases it tends to be somewhat overly prescriptive in nature as it tends to portray healing as a recipe that has certain steps to be followed. I believe this approach is useful for some, but I do not believe that a “one-size-fits-all” approach is always helpful. I do think that much of the literature has valid points about aspects significant to healing, such as reclaiming and connecting to one’s Indigenous culture, but I caution against a linear prescription for healing. Anderson,
Sterling and Ing in their works portrayed voices of First Nations people in a meaningful way. They made similar assertions to the ones I have made, professing the need for these voices to be acknowledged and written about. As a result, the hope is that Indigenous women’s traditional roles will be revitalized, as their voices and influences become stronger. I suggest that the personalized stories of Indigenous women in this study will enhance what I reviewed in the literature on healing and also validate what exists.

**Decolonization**

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2004) suggests that “Coming to know the past has been a part of the critical pedagogy of decolonization” (p. 34). In addition, Smith suggests that the process of decolonization must also include the process of recovering Indigenous stories and history, and retelling them through an Indigenous epistemology. Smith further elaborates on this process of self-determination and suggests that it includes a circle of decolonization, healing, transformation and mobilization (2004, p. 116). This process can occur on individual, personal and community levels and they are inextricably linked.

In Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2004), he defines oppression as dehumanization. Freire further asserts that in order for the oppressed to escape this dehumanization (as defined as the loss of humanity), the oppressed must engage in a process of humanization or becoming “more fully human” (2004, p. 44). Freire suggests humanization occurs when liberation from the oppressor begins (2004). I suggest that the process of liberation as indicated by Freire is closely related to that of decolonization. Freire states that the oppressed must reframe their worlds from being hopeless to being ones that can be completely changed and liberated (2004).
Hingley (2000) writes, “We can and must view our neocolonial oppressor mentalities as holding transformative powers whereby we can consciously change ourselves and the world in which we live” (p. 101). Hingley also suggests that this process starts with the individual and unfolds at the community level. James Youngblood Henderson (2000) further adds to Hingley’s perspective and suggests that in the early stages of decolonization, Indigenous people must accept the Eurocentric knowledge and worldview. Henderson asserts that knowing the oppressor enables the oppressed to win their fight and transform their lives. Like Freire, Henderson states that “To acquire freedom in the decolonized and delineated order, the colonized must break their silence and struggle to retake possession of their humanity and identity” (2000, p. 249).

In their discussion of the processes of decolonization, Laenui and Burgess (2000) outline the process of decolonization as including the following elements: a) rediscovery and recovery; b) mourning; c) dreaming; d) commitment; and e) action (2000, p. 152). The first phase of rediscovery and recovery is suggested to be the foundation for decolonization. In this phase, culture, language, identity are rediscovered or reclaimed and are the basis from which to continue; these factors guide the actions to follow. Mourning is the phase where victimization is realized and understood. Often, anger and resentment towards the oppressor surfaces and immersion in the history of colonization is also common. The third phase, dreaming, is characterized as the most crucial. Dreams or visions of a new reality form the foundation for the action to follow. Laenui and Burgess caution that this stage must not be rushed as it requires much “reflection” and “introspection” (2000, p. 156). Rushing this process often produces “short-sighted goals” and creates conflict (2000, p. 157). The next phase, commitment, entails that the group is unified and strong. There is a firm commitment to and consensus for change which the group envisions. The final phase, action, is characterized by action and by implementing the commitment. Final comments on this process note that decolonization is not a
linear process and that individuals or groups may revisit different phases throughout the process or transformation (Laenui & Burgess, 2000).

Like the literature on healing, the literature reviewed on decolonization also tends to be somewhat prescriptive and depersonalized. Once again the lived experience and stories of people’s decolonization processes are missing. In my experience, First Nations people may have some difficulty connecting with academic language and theory, particularly when it relates to such a personal and emotional subject. I also question whether men’s and women’s decolonization processes are the same. I believe there would be definite similarities, but the unique history and experiences that Indigenous women have endured through the process of colonization may make their needs distinct in some ways from those of men. Additionally, First Nations women have experienced violence and oppression by Indigenous men, which makes the decolonization process even more complicated. Not only do women have to resist the epistemologies of Western society, but they also have to do the same in their own communities which have, in many cases, adopted a patriarchal system of governance and family structure. Similarly, men also have unique experiences that make their processes of decolonization different from those of women. It is my belief that the telling of people’s journeys through their decolonization processes would significantly enhance the existing literature as it would add meaning to the words. This literature is of course valid in its own right and I believe the findings of this study will enhance what has been written on decolonization as well as on the subject of healing and wellness.

**Medicine Wheel Teachings**

In many Plains Indigenous cultures in North America, teachings relating to the Medicine Wheel are common. Michael Anthony Hart (2002) describes the Medicine Wheel and its teachings as a means to understand phenomena that reflect both the inner parts of people and the
world as we know it. He points out that there are many variations of the Wheel and the teachings vary widely amongst Indigenous communities. The Medicine Wheel is a circular figure that is divided into four quadrants, all representing different concepts, values and beliefs. The teachings include an explanation of the epistemology of the Nation from which they stem. Hart describes the concepts of the Medicine Wheel in the way he has come to know them from his Cree heritage. These concepts include wholeness, balance, connection, harmony and growth (2002, p. 40-44). Hart further illustrates the sacred values and beliefs associated with the Medicine Wheel teachings, which include vision/wholeness, being spirit-centred, respect/harmony, kindness, honesty/integrity, sharing, strength, bravery/courage, wisdom and respect/humility (2002, p. 45).

Dick (1998) describes the Medicine Wheel as a means by which a person can strive to maintain balance in life. She further describes the Wheel as having four main components relating to the self which are mental, physical, emotional and spiritual (1998, p. 91) (see Appendix 30). Dick states that “A person is whole when the opposite yet related aspects of the wheel are in balance (physical in balance with the spiritual, mental in balance with the emotional)” (1998, p. 91). Graveline (1998) describes the pedagogy of the Medicine Wheel: “This paradigm challenges us to shift from the linear, mechanistic cause-effect models of thinking now dominant in the Western industrial world, and to embrace the circular, ever-evolving dynamic captured in a single phrase: all life is a circle” (p. 75).

Bruyere (1999) states that there is a movement amongst Indigenous writers and scholars to utilize Medicine Wheel teachings to disseminate research, articulate theoretical ideas and present concepts. Bruyere further describes this development and explains why utilizing this approach is helpful in understanding people’s healing and decolonization processes:

The idea is to make use of a symbol that encapsulates a view of the world and a way of moving in that world. This symbol is not merely an intellectual representation of an aesthetic idea; rather, the circle as a symbol is taken from the elements of the natural
world. The representation of life as a cycle is a truth in relation to the passing of seasons, the ebb and flow of tides, the phases of the moon, and a human lifetime. The circle is natural law and, therefore, it follows that the development or the learning of human beings follows the circle. The Wheel represents wholeness or completeness. (1999, p. 174)

The Medicine Wheel teachings are as intricate as they are diverse. The values and beliefs that are the core of the Medicine Wheel teachings are complex. In order to gain a true understanding of them, it takes much time and reflection to internalize the meaning behind the ideas and concepts. What has been presented here is merely an introduction to the Medicine Wheel teachings. Utilizing these teachings is useful for many Indigenous people, but is not a reflection of the teachings of all Indigenous cultures. A problem associated with presenting this model for healing and wellness is that it does not reflect the diversity of First Nations cultures in North America. Nonetheless, it can be a useful tool for living in the world and understanding the self in relation to it. In addition, the Medicine Wheel is also a common means with which to examine Indigenous healing and wellness.

Summary

In this chapter, I describe and provide an analysis of the literature in relation to healing from the intergenerational effects of Residential Schools. The literature outlines many steps that can be taken towards healing and suggests that a major component includes connecting with culture and ceremony (Aboriginal Corrections Policy Unit, 2002; Sterling, 2002; Ing, 2000; Anderson, 2000). I also review decolonization literature, which asserts that this process is a transformation of consciousness and liberation from the oppressor, shifting one’s epistemology from oppressed to liberated (Tuhiwai Smith, 2004; Hingley, 2000; Laenui & Burgess, 2000). Lastly, I discuss Medicine Wheel teachings as described by the literature reviewed. These
teachings are useful when disseminating research and when striving to gain an understanding of phenomenon's such as healing. Furthermore, this is a culturally relevant means to present healing stories (Hart, 2002; Dick, 1998; Graveline, 1998; Bruyere, 1999). The next chapter is a description of the research design and methodologies utilized in this study. I also provide a rationale for the methods chosen and discuss validity and ethical considerations identified throughout this research process.
Chapter 4: Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

In the previous chapter I review literature on healing from the effects of Residential Schools, decolonization and Medicine Wheel teachings. I turn to provide an overview of the research design and methodologies utilized in this study, which were informed by the previous literature reviewed. An introduction to the Indigenous Approach utilized is provided, along with a rationale for the use of this method. An Indigenous research method is an appropriate guiding means for conducting inquiry with First Nations people. This methodology creates safety and meaning for both the researcher and participants and includes culture and ceremony as part of the process (Tuhiwai Te Rina Smith, 2000; Tuhiwai Smith, 2004; Faircloth, 2004). I also describe the use of a Qualitative Description method which was utilized as it seeks to minimally interpret the stories of participants. Rather, this method honors the stories by telling them in the words of the storytellers’ (Sandelowski, 2000). An Oral History methodology was also utilized and this chapter provides a description of this approach and the rationale for using it in the research design. Oral History research seeks to collect and validate stories over a lifespan (Cruikshank, 1994; Slim & Thompson, 1995). In addition, I illustrate the research design of this study and describe how relationship-building and including participants’ in the decision-making process was imperative. I provide a description of the analysis method utilized, which was a content analysis method. This type of analysis is useful when conducting Descriptive Research (Sandelowski, 2000; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998). I conclude this chapter with a discussion of validity and ethical considerations that I took into account while designing and carrying out this research. Concerns were reduced through reflexivity, verification, and balancing multiple roles and loyalties (Maxwell, 1996).
Indigenous Approach

The overarching approach used in this study was an Indigenous approach, based on the teachings and protocols I have been taught by Elders, spiritual mentors and other Indigenous researchers. An Indigenous approach takes into account the legacy of colonization and oppression that First Nations people have experienced. This type of approach is also culturally relevant and appropriate, and involves traditional and cultural knowledge and ceremony as a part of the process. At the same time this approach also works within the confines of mainstream research methods, but seeks to critically analyze these methods and utilize them in a means that will be respectful and meaningful for the participants (Tuhiwai Te Rina Smith, 2000). Western Eurocentric research that was done “on” Indigenous people contributed to this legacy of colonization and helped to perpetuate and justify racism as it was believed to be “empirical knowledge” (Tuhiwai Smith, 2004). Thereby, systemic racism was legitimated as a belief about our people’s inherent inferiority. Western research helped to create and perpetuate oppression, thereby creating the “necessity” for assimilation. Due to this historical context, Indigenous research strives to approach the collection, analysis and discussion of knowledge differently. Cheryl Crazy Bull (2004) describes Indigenous research methods as a means to “continue our dialogue about the role and nature of research. We must conduct research that helps inform and address community issues and concerns. We must build the capacity of our citizens to control and manage the research agenda” (p. 15).

My goal was to make the process for participants one that was safe, respectful and meaningful and would create an opportunity for any negative perceptions about research to be shifted and replaced with a positive view. Additionally, I strived to conduct research that would be relevant and useful for my community. Susan Faircloth (2004) states that the goal of Indigenous research is to “help to ensure the future success of Indian education by empowering Native communities and researchers to explore, acknowledge, and implement educational
practices that are culturally and linguistically appropriate and relevant..." (p. 24). Indigenous research has very high ethical standards one must adhere to, as the researcher’s accountability is to the community and to cultural teachings. Cultural teachings such as the ones I have learned, including showing honor and respect, shape this approach to research. Failure to adhere to these values and principles would cause great shame to the researcher and potentially make the results insignificant for the community.

**Qualitative Description and Oral History Methodologies**

A Qualitative Description approach was used in this study. Qualitative Description is a method that seeks to collect and present stories as told by the authors in plain language. This method is "categorical" and does not seek to deeply interpret the description in depth, although this method does seek to find the meanings within the stories (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 335). Sandelowski (2000) describes Qualitative Description as being "especially amenable to obtaining straight and largely unadorned (i.e., minimally theorized or otherwise transformed or spun) answers to questions of special relevance to practitioners and policy makers" (p. 337). Furthermore, Sandelowski illustrates that "the outcome of qualitative descriptive studies is a straight descriptive summary of the informational contents of data organized in a way that best fits the data" (2000, p. 338-339).

This research study has also drawn on an Oral History methodology. This method was used as a guiding means to collecting the women’s stories. Oral History research seeks to record people’s experiences over their life span. This research method seeks to extract meaning among stories and validate the knowledge, experience and expertise of the storyteller (Cruikshank, 1994). Slim and Thompson (1995) state that oral history studies “can help to mobilize a culture under threat, encouraging the revival of some traditions and conveying them to current and future generations as well as to outsiders” (p. 38). These approaches to research are, in my opinion,
culturally relevant and appropriate methods to use when collecting personal healing stories from First Nations women.

To reiterate, the research questions utilized in this research are as follows: What are the strategies that daughters of Indian Residential School survivors use to move towards healing from the intergenerational effects of the Schools? To what extent is reclaiming women’s traditional Indigenous roles related to the healing process? The research methods utilized in this study are appropriate for answering these questions because they are exploratory in nature and reflect the voices of the participants. Additionally, the methods are culturally relevant and participants have an active role as co-researchers, rather than there being a researcher-to-subject hierarchy. These methods also serve to empower individual and community change as the two questions create an opportunity for exploration of this movement.

**Research Design and Analysis**

**Sampling and Recruitment**

Sampling in this study was purposeful and was based on set criteria. Sandelowski (2000) describes purposeful sampling as being useful when using a Qualitative Description method as it enables the researcher to “obtain cases deemed information-rich for the purposes of the study” (p. 338). Participants were required to define themselves as being First Nations, Aboriginal, Indigenous or Native and be women of nineteen years of age or older. Participants had to be the daughters of an Indian Residential School survivor and were required to define themselves as being engaged in a healing journey. Participants were recruited via advertising posters which were emailed out to third-party contacts. I received a response to the advertising posters from sixteen Indigenous women across Canada and the United States wanting to participate in the study. For me, this amount of interest validated the purpose and need for this research.
Data Gathering Process

Relationship building was an imperative part of the process. I worked towards developing trust with the women, as I needed to ensure that the participants felt comfortable and safe with me and with the methods of this research. In order to work towards the goal of building a relationship with the women, I spoke with them over the phone numerous times and met some of them for coffee. The conversations were informal and involved discussing the research and a mutual sharing about ourselves. I recorded memos during this stage of the process and they were kept through the entire duration of the study. Participants were invited to become involved in the research process and in decision-making about the data and analysis. This created transparency within the process which can help to reduce negative perceptions or fears about being involved in this kind of study. The research process has been a shared process, and this is a culturally appropriate way to conduct Indigenous inquiry. Slim and Thompson (1995) state that stories must be treated with the utmost respect and a “reciprocal exchange is required in which what is heard is both given back and carried forward” (p.2).

The six oral history interviews each lasted approximately one to one and a half hours. The loosely structured interviews (see Appendix 1) were audio-taped and transcribed. Participants were asked to describe how they were affected by having a parent who attended Residential School. They were also asked to share about their process or journey of healing from the effects of the Schools. Observations, insights and preliminary analysis were recorded in memos upon each interview.

Analysis

I transcribed the interviews verbatim and this process was useful for analysis and gaining an in-depth understanding of the stories. I sent the transcripts back to the participants for editing and clarification. A content analysis method was used to make sense of the stories as a whole.
The data was coded and organized into content categories. The codes changed numerous times as my understanding of the data and categories increased. This type of analysis is useful when studying descriptive phenomena (Sandelowski, 2000). This process included reading and listening to the stories, noting my insights and interpretations, developing and modifying emerging themes and making conclusions by summarizing the women's stories (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998; Sandelowski, 2000).

Verifying and Validity

Upon completion of the first draft of this thesis, I presented a copy of it to all of the women that were interviewed. I asked them to verify whether their stories were portrayed accurately and in a respectful way. I also asked them to provide me with feedback on the draft and make any comments they wished. This verification process contributed to enhancing the validity of this research (Maxwell, 1996). The response I received was very positive and encouraging. The women will be invited to a feast upon completion of this project in order to honor them for their courage to tell their healing stories.

I have maintained a relationship with all of the women interviewed in this study. When I entered into a relationship with them, I did not do so only for the duration of this research. The friendships that are the outcome of this research are for a lifetime, and I will continue to cherish each of them in the days to come.

Ethical Considerations

An ethical factor considered in this study was the potential for participants to become distressed in the process of telling their personal history (Maxwell, 1996). The competencies of my interviewing/counseling skills as a social worker were important in this respect. I was prepared to provide emotional support and stop the interview if it was necessary. Although this
did not become an issue, I understood that I had the responsibility to make the storytelling process a positive experience. I did some debriefing with participants after the tape recorder was turned off and provided some referrals to appropriate professional and cultural support.

Another ethical consideration I examined related to my functioning within multiple roles (Maxwell, 1996). I am a member of the First Nations community being researched and I am also the daughter of a Residential School survivor. Therefore, it was up to me to balance these multiple roles and be continuously reflecting upon them and how this impacted on the research. I believe having a personal connection to the community and to the topic enhanced the research process, as the participants and I were able to make a meaningful connection. I believe I created a space for them to feel safe to share their stories. I considered the possibility that my close connection to the community and the research could make participants feel uncomfortable and concerned about confidentiality; however, I have had no indication that this was a problem. First Nations communities do tend to be quite small and everyone knows each other. Therefore, I took extra care in ensuring that the participants’ identities were kept confidential, and I verified whether or not any identifying information in the data needed to be removed from the final report. I believe this verification of the information presented has reduced the possibility of a participant feeling betrayed by the contents of the final report. This project has been an emotional process for me and has also been greatly meaningful. I have taken care to balance maintaining professionalism and my own humanity at the same time.

A final consideration I had was that I proceeded carefully so as not to undermine my loyalty to two separate communities (Maxwell, 1996). I have multiple loyalties, both to the University of British Columbia and to the participants. A document has been created that satisfies both of these parties, which has been a difficult achievement. In keeping with my cultural beliefs and practices, my primary loyalty has been to my Indigenous community. I have been a member of the University community for a short time (for the purpose of this research).
but I will remain a member of the First Nations community for the rest of my life. Therefore, great care has been taken to conduct this project in a way that will be respected by the participants and my community. My role in the community is that of a helper, and I need to avoid compromising the trust that I have gained in this respect with community members. Values such as being respectful, maintaining humility, generosity, sharing and showing honor towards others have been imperative in carrying out this research.

Summary

This chapter provides a description of the research design of this study. I discuss the research methodologies utilized which included an Indigenous Approach, Qualitative Description and an Oral History Method. I describe the importance of utilizing an Indigenous Approach when conducting research with First Nations people as it is culturally relevant and sensitive to the unique historical context (Tuhiwai Te Rina Smith, 2000; Tuhiwai Smith, 2004; Faircloth, 2004). I outline the Qualitative Description Approach utilized and suggest that it is relevant as the words of the storytellers' are portrayed, rather than the researchers' insights and interpretations (Sandelowski, 2000). I also describe the tenants of the Oral History Methodology and describe how it is useful when studying phenomenons of cultural revival and identity as it seeks to validate people's stories over their lifetime (Cruikshank, 1994; Slim & Thompson, 1995). Additionally, I describe the use of a content analysis method that was utilized to gain an understanding and add meaning to the stories (Sandelowski, 2000; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998). Lastly, I speak to ethical and validity concerns that surfaced in this study, describing the importance of reflexivity and verification in minimizing these concerns (Maxwell, 1996). In the next chapter, I present the stories of the six women who are daughters of Indian Residential School survivors. I
introduce the effects they attribute as stemming from their parent attending Residential School and present the steps they have taken towards healing and wellness.
Chapter 5: Results

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I describe the research design and methodologies utilized for this study. Furthermore, I illustrate how the stories were analyzed and the steps taken to reduce validity and ethical considerations. I turn to present the women’s stories in their own words, as this chapter illustrates the results of this study. I first describe the storytellers’ accounts of their parents’ experiences in Residential School. Second, I present the themes relating to the intergenerational effects of Residential Schools as described by the six women. These five themes include disconnection from Indigenous identity and heritage, parenting difficulties, living in silence, experiences of racism, and compromised mental wellness. Third, I describe the storytellers’ steps taken towards healing; these include gaining post-secondary education, learning about and connecting with Indigenous identity, attending therapy and healing programs, working towards forgiveness and understanding their parents’ experience in Residential School, changing family patterns, and being helpers in their community.

Oral Histories of Six Indigenous Women

The results of this study indicate the six women were significantly impacted by having a parent who attended Residential School. The women described experiencing disconnection from their Indigenous identities and heritage, abuse and neglect, poor family communication, racism and mental health issues. The main steps the women took towards healing from the effects of Residential School included gaining post-secondary education, learning about and connecting with their Indigenous identity, attending therapy and healing programs, working towards
forgiveness and understanding their parents’ experience in Residential School, changing family
patterns, and being helpers in their communities.

Prior to entering into discussion about how the six women interviewed have worked
towards healing, I present the factors they attribute as effects. The effects of the Schools and the
steps taken towards healing as described by Rose, Ann, Zoe, Eliza, Flora and Tina (pseudonyms
are used to protect the identity of the women interviewed) closely resemble what I found in the
research literature. The themes that emerged surfaced as I searched for the meanings within the
stories. I attempted to gain insight and discover what they were trying to tell me, thereby
capturing the essence of their stories.

I found more commonalities than differences in the stories. The women are all mothers
and are helpers in their communities. Five of the women are in their 30’s and one is in her 40’s.
Two of the women are studying at the graduate degree level, two have undergraduate degrees and
two have both completed college programs. Five of the storytellers live in urban areas and one
lives on reserve. The women are from the following Nations:

Rose: Coast Salish Nation;
Ann: Kwakwaka’wakw Nation;
Zoe: Coast Salish and Kwakwaka’wakw Nations;
Eliza: Carrier Nation;
Flora: Kwakwaka’wakw Nation;
Tina: Gitksan Nation.

Description of the Women’s Parents’ Experiences in Residential School

Rose’s mother attended the Seachelt and Mission Residential Schools and she shared that
both institutions had very bad reputations for their brutality towards the children. In Residential
School her mother experienced, “being isolated, being segregated, separated from mainstream, isolated from family....” In addition, Rose shared the following about her mother’s experiences in the Seachelt and Mission Residential Schools:

…it was hard and it was difficult and isolating. The memories that she has, there’s some very traumatic memories there. Them cutting her very long hair, our hair is sacred so cutting hair, public beatings, public shaming, being hungry, being isolated away from her brothers and sisters.

Ann’s mother attended the St. Michael’s Residential School. Ann talked about how her mother lived mostly in silence and was able to share her experiences from Residential School with very few people. She shared that her mother never spoke of her experiences with her. Ann described how after her mother’s death, she would imagine what her mother might have gone through at St. Michael’s. Ann stated the following:

I wonder if she experienced this or that. I’ve heard some of the stories from friends and family who attended St. Michael’s of their experience and that it wasn’t a very happy place. Sort of attributing some of that sorrow to the fact that she was disconnected from her siblings and her parents...

Zoe’s father attended St. Michael’s Residential School in Alert Bay. She was also unable to describe any of her father’s experiences, as he has never shared them with her. The only thing that Zoe knows of his experience is that he was whipped when he spoke his language.

Eliza’s mother attended Residential School as well, but her mother has never shared her experiences with her. Eliza stated, “I don’t know that she’s been able to tell anyone.” Therefore, Eliza was not able to describe any part of her mother’s experiences in Residential School.

Flora’s mother attended St. Michael’s Residential School. Her mother shared her experiences at Residential School with her when they met for the first time when Flora was
eighteen. This was the first time Flora’s mother had spoken about her experiences with anyone and she has not done so since then. Flora described what her mother shared:

Well like I said she spoke about having a number, I know that she wasn’t allowed to have any personal effects. No pictures of family, she had her head shaved, she was scrubbed down, all their clothes were burned. It sounded very much like the Holocaust to me, like I knew quite a bit about it, about the Jewish Holocaust. So it, it sounded, it sounded just like that to me, I was completely shocked. She didn’t have anything positive to say, she said she barely learned how to read. She had to teach herself. Her brothers went to the same one, but they weren’t allowed to see each other, except over the fence. The boys and girls were separated and great efforts were taken at that School to make sure family members didn’t talk to one another.

The food she said was horrible, it often had bugs in it and they had to line up for cod liver oil and it was often rancid and they were always hungry. They weren’t allowed to eat fish, so she said they were all very skinny.

Similarly, Tina’s mother shared her experiences from Residential School with very few people. Tina spoke about how her mother was not so willing to tell her what happened to her in School, but she did know of some of the things that her mother had shared with her step-father. Tina spoke about how she did know that her mother ran away from the School and continued to run away throughout her time there. Tina described how after her mother’s death she found documents that described the abuse she had suffered at the Residential School. Tina shared the following:

When I found those papers, proving that she was raped repeatedly for ten years. From six to the age of fifteen. So when she told me she ran away, it started to make sense. She
never told me why. I still wonder; I think it’s because she thought herself an unworthy person.

She did tell my dad some pretty awful stories. Sometimes I would choose not to believe them. She would tell her stories about them putting needles in her tongue as a child because she would try to speak her language. I remember my dad telling me once and I didn’t want to hear it again that someone would beat her with a dog chain. And she’d have to hide under a kitchen table. So, those weren’t very nice things to hear about how she suffered and it broke my heart, still does.

It is clear the Residential School survivors discussed here have all lived in silence and shared their experiences with few people. Some of those stories have not been told and were taken to the spirit world untold. One can ascertain that the untold stories must have been filled with brutality and severe trauma. Living in silence is a common way to protect the self from becoming overwhelmed and having to relive past experiences of abuse or suffering. I suspect that many of the six women’s parents experienced first-hand or witnessed acts of violence while they were in Residential School.

The Effects

The six women identified five specific effects they suffered from having a parent attend Residential School; these included disconnection from Indigenous identity and heritage, parenting difficulties, living in silence, experiences of racism, and compromised mental wellness. It is difficult to separate these effects from each other into categories or themes as they are all connected and relate to one another. They are set within the context of Indigenous people that have experienced extreme hardship and suffering due to the forces and legacy of colonialism that
still exist in the present day. It is within this context that the effects of Residential Schools have been perpetuated through many generations of First Nations families and communities.

_Disconnection from Indigenous Identity and Heritage_

Many Residential School survivors experienced a loss of culture and disconnection from their communities and families which resulted in the destruction of identity among First Nations people. As a consequence, many children of survivors were not exposed to their Nations' traditions, ceremonies, values and beliefs, and have been left without an Indigenous identity. Furthermore, the survivors' children were therefore not able to have a connection to their culture and teachings, thereby perpetuating this effect intergenerationally. The storytellers' in this study reiterated this phenomenon and described their experiences in relation to being disconnected from their identities. The two sub-themes that emerged within this theme include disconnection from family, community and culture, and disconnection from language.

_Disconnection from Family, Community and Culture_

The intention of Residential Schools was to destroy the children’s connection to and understanding of their culture and its beliefs and practices. In many cases this goal was achieved. The women in this study described how their parents became disconnected from their families, communities and culture as a result of attending Residential School. The women spoke about how their parents’ disconnection to their Indigenous heritage trickled down to them, and they were also stripped of their identity and teachings as a result. Having a strong grounding in one’s First Nations culture is commonly identified as a protective factor from at-risk behaviors such as violence, substance misuse and lack of self-efficacy (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2003). Without this risk preventing factor while growing up, the women spoke about some of the
difficult experiences they had as a result. They described how they attributed these difficult experiences to being an effect of their parents’ experience in Residential School.

Rose was raised away from her Coast Salish community and culture with her mother, step-father and his parents who are non-First Nations. She spoke about how growing up without having an Indigenous identity affected her deeply. Rose shared the following thoughts on how Residential Schools contributed to this cultural disconnection and loss of identity:

…it’s this lack of identity Residential School created, being that you know assimilation, being that it was legislated colonization where the churches and state worked together to try to civilize the ‘savage’ and in doing that they stripped people of identity and stripped them of culture and values. But in terms of identity, my mom, when she came back to reserve, like she didn’t fit in. Like she wasn’t, she wasn’t white enough - she wasn’t Indian enough. It was like the policies about legislating the civilization, it didn’t, it didn’t work. It just left people with no identity. It didn’t make them white enough, where they could blend into, into society, but it left them culture-less. Like without family, kinship ties, it just left them without identity.

Rose spoke about how this sense of being “culture-less” was passed on to her from her mother and grandmother. In addition, her mother kept the identity of her biological father from her until she was eighteen. Therefore, Rose experienced a disconnection from her father’s Indigenous heritage as well.

Ann described her experiences of disconnection from her Nation, family and culture, as her mother left her Kwakwaka’wakw community for an urban area. Her mother moved away from Alert Bay after Residential School and did not stay connected to the community, family or her culture. As a consequence, Ann did not grow up connected to her identity and grew up in an urban centre.
Ann stated that if it was not for the Residential School, her mother would have likely had “a stronger connection to her siblings and the family....” After her mother’s death, Ann had a biography paper to write on a role model for a school assignment. Ann decided to interview her aunt who attended St. Michael’s with her mother, in hope that she would gain insight into her mother’s experiences there. Ann shared the following about her crusade to learn about her mother:

...I was gonna go to my auntie and she was gonna tell me her story and through her I was going to learn all these things about my mom. And I remember going over there and sitting with her and hearing that you know, although they went to the same Residential School because they were four years apart, you know they had the junior, intermediate and seniors... dormitories split up in the Residential School, so they didn’t see each other in the Residential School. And because they were orphaned, they didn’t see each other in the summer as well...

Ann spoke about her disappointment, but this experience helped her to understand the source of disconnection among members in her family.

Zoe grew up in her Coast Salish community surrounded by family and culture. She experienced disconnection from her father and his Kwakwaka’wakw family and heritage as he was not a part of her life growing up. Zoe shared that she attributes her father’s not being able to be in her life as an effect of him suffering through Residential School. Zoe shared, “Well I never thought my dad would have an effect on me because he wasn’t there. But it’s because he wasn’t there, that I was affected.”

Eliza was also raised among her people and family. She described how her grandmother was the most significant person in her life growing up. Her grandmother passed on important cultural values and beliefs which embrace what Eliza believes to be the heart of Carrier culture. Eliza shared, “And my grandmother, I asked her once why she didn’t carry on by teaching
appropriate family members about the hereditary customs like the chieftainship that our family held. Because she stopped teaching about who we were to people, and she said she had lost so many kids at that point that it was just so sad for her.” Eliza further described the impact of teachings not being passed on in her family:

The abuse includes displacement of our own values; people no longer talk about where they come from. My name tells me who I am. When my grandmother died it all died with her because she never taught anybody else in our family. So we don’t have any more names to give, except for the ones that we own. So how do you transmit that, if you don’t have your stories? If you don’t have your line to your family?

Although Eliza had a strong connection to her grandmother that was filled with love and nurturing, she did not have the same experience with her mother. Eliza spoke about how her mother was really disconnected from her family and culture, despite the fact that she lived in their Carrier community. As a consequence, Eliza’s mother was not able to connect with her children. Eliza described her mother as being emotionally absent while growing up. Her grandmother was her primary link to her culture and Eliza credits her grandmother’s teachings as the reason she was open to gaining positive attention from other extended family and community members, all of which helped her make a strong connection to her identity.

Flora was given up for adoption at birth, and she and her mother did not connect until Flora was eighteen years of age. She was raised by non-Indigenous parents away from her Kwakwaka’wakw people and heritage. Flora described how her identity was concealed from her, and she always longed to know where she came from and to learn about her culture. She spoke about this longing as a child and shared:

We had these poplar trees around our house and I used to climb them and carve faces in the trees. I saw a Sesame Street show on Indian carving and so I immediately grabbed one
of my dad's carving knives and would go up in the trees. It was a really good memory for me.

Flora also described how her mother became disconnected from her family while she was in Residential School. She spoke about how her mother was not allowed contact with her siblings at the School; therefore, they were not able to form close relationships. Flora further described what it was like for her mother to go home to her community during holidays:

She went home at holidays, but that wasn't very positive because the community was in such grief over a variety of things, a variety of losses, but the greatest one being that the children weren't there. So, when the children all of a sudden were in the community it created a lot of mayhem and she didn't feel safe in that environment. It probably wasn't, she didn't talk about it but, she had a very um, the only thing she would talk about was her relationship with her father, which was very adversarial.

Family ties were greatly compromised for Flora's mother, not being connected to her siblings, her father, or her first born daughter. Flora's mother was not able to parent her while she remained in Residential School and she was forced to conceal her pregnancy.

Tina grew up away from her community and was raised by her non-First Nations step-father in Vancouver. Tina's mother left her Gitksan community as a young adult and never went back, remaining disconnected from her community and traditions. Her mother was not able to raise her, nor did she ever speak of their heritage or identity. Tina felt extreme sadness and despair over the absence of her mother. Tina grew up longing to understand why her mother could not be in her life and to gain an understanding of her Indigenous identity. She shared stories about her best memories as a child involving time spent with a First Nations family they knew because she could then see what it was like to be First Nations. Tina shared, "I did even as a child have a longing to be Indian, and have an identity.” Tina did not meet her mother's family until she was an adult, and she continues to strive to develop a relationship with them today.
Disconnection from Language

All of the women described being unable to speak their language, as it was not passed on to them from their parents, who in many cases lost the ability to speak it in Residential School. It has been documented over and over that the children were physically punished for speaking their language in School and, as a consequence, many survivors have a fear of exploring a connection to their Indigenous language. Some of the women described being curious about their languages as children, although in some cases there was a refusal in their families to teach or speak their tongue. They had difficulty understanding as children why talking their language was ‘bad’, but as adults have identified that it was a protective factor.

Rose spoke about how her mother and other family members thought that sheltering her from the culture and language would give her a better chance in life, as she would be able to better fit into ‘white society’. Rose shared about the loss of language she experienced in her family:

...you know my grandmother never taught us the language, my grandmother knew Hul’q’umin’um’, my grandmother knew customs, my grandmother never knitted, but her sisters did. And you know her sisters would talk to her in Indian and she wouldn’t, she’d answer them in English and sometimes I would hear her talking Indian and I’d ask her words and she was okay with sharing it, but on a natural level. It was, she was really trying to stop being Indian. She didn’t go to the Bighouse, she knew all the teachings, you know because she was brought up with it. But at whatever point the wanting to stop it...

Rose’s grandmother never did pass on the language to her or to Rose’s mother before she died.

Ann described how her mother was not able to teach her their Kwakwala language and how she always longed to learn it. Ann’s mother only ever spoke only a few words in their language to her and her siblings. She shared a bit about this:
Like ever since I was young because my, my mother lost the language, she didn’t speak... like *Haniquay* is one word in Kwakwala that means like ‘hurry up’. That was just one word that I remember my mom knew. It was like, “hurry up, *haniquay, haniquay!*” But other than that, you know... if she knew, she remembered any, she didn’t speak it...

Ann attributes this loss of language to her mother being in Residential School. Ann spoke about how her aunt has been able to retain the language and she wonders why her mother was not able to do the same.

Zoe described briefly how her father has not passed his Kwakwala language to her even though he was able to retain the ability to speak despite being whipped in School for speaking it. Zoe shared that she is not able to speak either of her traditional languages.

Eliza spoke about the teachings she received from her grandmother, but because they were passed to her in English, there was a lot lost in the translation. She spoke about how she did not learn her language, as no one in her family was able to pass it on to her. As a result, she has not been able to learn the true meanings behind her teachings in the language.

Flora was also unable to learn her Kwakwala language due to being raised away from her family and community in a non-Indigenous adoptive home. She described her mother losing the ability to speak the language in Residential School and how she was unable to relate to community members when she returned.

Tina has also never been able to learn her Gitksan language. Her mother never spoke it to her and also lost the ability to speak it in Residential School. Due to her complete disconnection from her family and culture, she has also been deprived of the opportunity to explore learning her traditional language.

The theme of disconnection from Indigenous identity and heritage identifies how significantly the distance from culture affected the lives and identities of the six women. The women described the impacts of not having a connection to their families, their communities and
culture as a result of their parents’ disconnection from their identity that was facilitated in Residential School. As a consequence, their identities as Indigenous women were not developed and they longed to know and understand their culture. A loss of language for all of the participants was also described as impacting them and contributing to their sense of disconnection.

Parenting Difficulties

Residential Schools sought to dismantle traditional parenting practices and replace these with patriarchal family structures. In effect, survivors’ did not learn how to parent their children and, as a result, the children experienced many negative outcomes of this legacy. Due to the survivors’ difficulties with parenting, their children experienced many challenges while growing up. Such difficulties may have included violence and exposing children to individuals who posed a risk to children. The six women all identified their parents’ parenting difficulties as an effect of their experiences in Residential School. Four sub-themes emerged and include abuse and neglect, teenage pregnancy, family violence, and an inability to parent.

Abuse and Neglect

The daughters of survivors identified that they experienced abuse and neglect while growing up as a consequence of their parents’ difficulty in providing them with a safe and nurturing home. They attributed these parenting difficulties to being a result of their attending Residential School as they did not learn how to parent and did not receive nurturing; therefore, they did not have the role models to show them how to have a sense of intimacy with their children.
Rose described experiencing sexual abuse, not by her Indigenous family, but by her non-First Nations step-father’s family. Rose described multiple generations of Indigenous women in her family marrying non-Indigenous men who were abusive to their partners and children. She shared the following about patterns of sexual abuse and violence in her family which she attributes to being effects of the Schools:

...patterns repeating itself, like my mother married a man who was very abusive and he was abusive not only to her, but to me sexually abusive. So my dad was sexually abusive, his dad was sexually abusive. They were non-Native people and I think I just, it feels like... my mom and I were just talking about this the other night, how cycles are repeated...

Rose described her mother and grandmother as being neglectful during her childhood, but that she thought, “they were doing the best with what they had and what they knew....”

Ann spoke about her mother not being able to be there for her as a mother and consequently experienced neglect in some respects. Ann described her mother as being consumed with sorrow and shared that she often listened to her mother: “I was exposed to those late nights of listening to her sad stories.” Ann’s mother committed suicide when she was fifteen years of age, and she shared the following about her mother:

...she quite often spoke about how life wasn’t fair and... you know and being suicidal, like I think I said too is that she was always suicidal and she always spoke of death. She always let us know (she and her brother and sister) where she wanted to be buried....

Ann also spoke about how there was often a role-reversal in her relationship with her mother in the caretaking, particularly when she was in a state of depression and drinking.

Eliza described how she was emotionally neglected by her mother and how she was never able to show physical affection towards her. She shared, “she didn’t hug me when I was growing up. She was not huggie to any of us, all us kids; we all felt in different ways... the absence of her
connection.” She described filling this void of a mother’s nurturing by turning to her grandmother and her side of the family to get her emotional needs met while growing up.

**Teenage Pregnancy**

The prevalence of teen pregnancy was also described by the storytellers as being an impact of Residential School. Sex education was not taught in Residential School, an absence of which commonly leads to early pregnancy in many cases. A Catholic education was provided instead; this consisted of speaking of sex as being ‘bad’ and labeling the Indian children as being sexually promiscuous on the basis of racist assumptions. Some of the women spoke about how they were born when their mothers were teenagers and, as a consequence, they were not equipped with the parenting skills needed to raise them. In addition, some of the women described having their own children while they were teens and suggested that having children at an early age is an intergenerational impact of Residential Schools.

Rose described how her mother became pregnant with her at an early age and how she attributes this to being an effect of Residential School:

But the impact of that um is for me to start back to where my mom was a fifteen years old, she just turned fifteen; she was pregnant when she was fourteen with me. And she had said that when she went to the Residential School there was no kind of education about sex and how to avoid it or how, there was just, just no education about it and I mean it’s almost as if she really didn’t know how to get pregnant, and got pregnant at a very, very young age.

Rose’s mother did not receive parenting education and, as a consequence, had many difficulties parenting as a result.

Eliza gave birth to her first child when she was fifteen. She shared about being pregnant at such a young age:
I was mentally thirteen. I was really young emotionally. Yet when I found out I was pregnant, I grew up just like that. My whole mind went poof; everything I had ever been taught about having babies, was suddenly remembered! I had to behave myself, I knew that my baby was listening to me, I knew I had responsibilities.

Eliza spoke about how she and her son went into foster care together and her son was raised as her brother. Her mother and step-father ended up raising her son and they grew up together.

Flora described how her mother was also a teenager when she gave birth to her. The impact of her adoption into a non-First Nations home was that she experienced complete disconnection from her identity, culture and family. Flora’s mother did not have the ability to raise her at such a young age as she did not have the parenting skills and was still in Residential School where she had to keep the pregnancy a secret. Flora described her mother’s account of her birth:

My mother was at the Alert Bay Residential School and during her time there she became pregnant with me. And she chose to give me up. So she became pregnant with me at the Alert Bay Residential School and she hid her pregnancy from everyone, except for her father and her mother had already passed away by that time and her best friend Pete. And Pete’s sister. Um, those were the only ones who really knew about me. And she hadn’t finished her schooling so she wanted to continue. And she had me at her Christmas break so she could return in January. It worked out that way.

Family Violence

The women spoke about the impact of witnessing family violence while growing up. They attributed their mothers’ choosing abusive partners to their low sense of self-worth which was fostered in Residential School. They described their mothers not feeling that they deserved to be treated with respect. In addition, some of the storytellers spoke about how they themselves
also chose abusive partners. They attribute their parents’ difficulty with parenting them as not
giving them the self-esteem and guidance to choose healthy partners.

Rose described witnessing violence in the home as a child. She spoke about how her
step-father often ridiculed her mother for being First Nations and violence would erupt. Rose
described him using power and control tactics in the home and that there were two generations of
non-Indigenous men inflicting abuse upon their First Nations wives in her family.

Zoe spoke in depth about the domestic violence that she endured from her ex-partner. She
shared, “I know why I, I was lost there for a while as a parent with my children’s real father. I
ended up being with someone who wasn’t available to me.” Zoe described some of the abuse she
endured:

We met at a very young, but then as time went on and we had our daughter and all the
bills and him having alcohol and drug abuse problems, like it just got worse where... like
you know all of a sudden I didn’t realize he had all of the control over everything, like
everything... who I talked to, who I was with, what job I had, if I had a job, you know
how much money I had, what bills we paid and didn’t pay... You know I lost all control
over everything. But, I know that I went through all of that for a reason, to be where I am
today. I, I won’t go there again.

After having left this relationship, Zoe was able to identify that she chose this abusive man to be
in her life as a result of not having a father available to her while she grew up. She spoke about
how she chose someone who was like her father. As a result, her children are growing up today
without their biological father.

Eliza grew up witnessing domestic violence in her home. Eliza’s step-father inflicted
abuse on her mother and she stayed in the relationship for many years. She spoke about her and
her siblings protecting their younger siblings from the family violence. Eliza shared the
following about this insight:
So we got sent off to Residential School. I think the Indian Agent at the time was just trying to save us from the step-father scenario. It was really hard for us to leave because we had younger sisters and a brother that we were leaving. And we didn’t see each other as step-brothers and sisters, we just saw them as our sisters and our brother. They were left alone and whereas before, my older sister’s and brother’s were involved in protecting them from the violence and the stuff that went on and it was all the partying and all that. They were vulnerable, so that part of it was hard.

As a young adult, Eliza experienced violence at the hands of her partner. She shared about her experiences in this relationship:

I lived in a violent relationship myself when my youngest was small, a baby. And the only reason that happened was I was away from my family. He had to isolate me from my family.

Inability to Parent

As a result of not having experienced models of healthy parenting and because of their experiences of abuse in Residential School, some of the survivors’ were described as not having the ability to parent. As a consequence, the storytellers’ described how their parents’ lack of ability to raise them impacted them significantly. They described the pain and difficult emotions associated with not receiving the love and nurturing they needed from their parents’ while growing up.

Zoe spoke about how her father was not able to parent her. She shared, “He just, I don’t know stopped coming around when I was around five and abandoned me for about seven years. So I had a lot of abandonment issues and I still, you still deal with it.” Zoe talked about how her father did not know how to be a father and reiterated that she chose a partner who was like her
dad. She shared that while growing up she would try to be the perfect child because she thought that if she was perfect then her dad would love her more.

Flora’s mother was not able to parent her. As previously mentioned, Flora was given up for adoption at birth. She described how she was the only child out of her siblings who was born in Bella Bella and how her mother still, to this day, has difficulty going there. Flora attributes this to the memory of her birth and how hard it must have been to give up her first born daughter, based on her circumstances at the time of pregnancy.

Tina’s mother was also unable to parent her, her brother, or a sister who has been in foster care all her life. Tina shared that she knows now that her mother did not want to give them up to her step-father, but that she could not raise them due to what happened to her in Residential School. Her mother was aware that she did not have the capacity to raise her children and therefore placed them in homes that she felt could care for them.

The theme of parenting difficulties was an effect of Residential Schools that caused deep anguish and pain for the women. The women described experiences of being abused and neglected, teenage pregnancy, family violence and their parents’ inability to parent them. They attributed these effects to being results of Residential Schools. These effects caused a lot of inner turmoil and suffering for the women, and further contributed to their sense of disconnection from their families and culture.

Living in Silence

The six women identified silence as being a significant pattern within their families. As previously mentioned, the survivors’ experiences in Residential School were often held inside in silence. Survivors of Residential School were not taught communication skills and were, in many cases, punished when they did express themselves. As adults, many survivors were unable to communicate in a healthy way or express their pain. This effect was transmitted
intergenerationally to many children of survivors. As a consequence of the silence and the absence of communication skills, the women described having difficulty communicating as adults and understanding their parents’ behaviors.

Ann spoke about how her mother never shared her experiences of Residential School with her. Ann shared about her mother's silence:

...like it was just so heavy, right, so heavy like there was so much she was holding on to that she didn’t share... like I say, I guess like I don’t know what her experiences were, so she carried all of that. Um, you know, like it’s only been in like the last few years that my auntie and uncle have been able to share, like it’s been more of a safe place to do that. And my, my um... in the early eighties or the mid-eighties it just wasn’t the time where that was coming out yet at all.

Zoe identified the communication problems her father has within the family as an effect of having attended Residential School. She spoke about how he has difficulty speaking to his children directly:

I mean, when time went on and I learned about my other sisters and my brother, they thought that my dad favored me the most. And I thought that he favored them the most! And that, the reason that it’s like that, I found out after a while was because he doesn’t talk to each of us about our self, he talks to us about all the rest of us. So we get this um, it’s sort of like a communication skill, he doesn’t think to talk directly to the person who he’s proud of or what he’s proud of.

You know like it’s like a, like a communication skill that... like once I got talking with my, my three sisters and my brother... I was like well I thought he liked you guys better than me, you know! But it was just one of those things again where our communication skill, where there’s that inability...
She described communicating with her father as a struggle that she and he continue to work on today together.

Eliza spoke about communication problems within her family today. She shared, “our family’s really passive, they don’t fight, like we don’t have screaming matches. They’re really passive aggressive, they just like stop talking to me....” Eliza identified that because her mother did not talk to her and her siblings, they learned to not talk to each other. Additionally, her mother has not spoken of her experiences in Residential School and continues to carry that pain inside.

Flora met her mother as a young adult. Upon them meeting, her mother told her everything about her experiences at Residential School. This was the first time her mother had spoken of her experiences and it was also the last. Flora shared about her mother’s disclosure:

And she told me everything... that happened to her. Which I, I didn’t know that she had never talked about it before to anyone. But she told me what her number was, what the first time was like that she went there, the boat ride, everything. And I was overwhelmed by it because um I was very naïve when I was eighteen and I didn’t know about Residential Schools.

And I know that my sisters have communicated frustration that she won’t talk to them. And that they were quite shocked that she had shared her experiences with me, openly. Um, but she’s only done that once! I’ve tried to get her to talk, you know on other occasions and she won’t. So I didn’t know that it was a one time sort of thing.

Tina’s mother also did not share her experiences of Residential School. Her mother took her silence with her to the spirit world. Tina shared what she learned about her mother after her death:
And it wasn't until she passed away that I found out through her friends, that she had so much fear. She feared that she was never good enough, just as I had. She feared that, ah we would never forgive her for leaving us.

But it was hard for her to reach out or I guess she just, there wasn't enough therapy or she, there wasn't enough trust for her to fully reach out. And so she had to carry that with her for a long time. And it was her awful memories of Residential School that made her drink to ease the pain of her childhood memories.

The theme of living in silence was identified by the women as being an intergenerational pattern in their families. As a consequence, they had difficulty understanding the experiences and actions of their parents' and there was little or no communication in their families. This created difficulty for them as adults in maintaining relationships and communicating. As a result, they have had to work at learning how to communicate with their family members and partners as adults.

*Experiences of Racism*

The lived experience of dealing with racism has many stories to be told. The women spoke about these experiences and their parents' experiences, reflecting on its impact on their lives. They spoke about the difficulties of trying to cope with marginalization, systemic racism, discrimination and internalized racism.

Rose described her experience with having a non-Indigenous step-father who was racist. She attributed her mother choosing a non-First Nations man to marry as a result of her lack of self-worth and internalized racism. She shared the following about her step-father:

...I was taught these messages from very young and also once again the pattern of having a father that was very, very racist against First Nations people, yet being with a First
Nations woman... the irony of that. And hearing him you know even saying stuff like the word squaw...

In Rose’s family the idea of ‘becoming more white’ and ‘less Indian’ was the means by which they coped with the discrimination they endured. Rose elaborated on this and shared:

...the idea of being white was ideal because you don’t, you have privilege, you have power, you have the vote, you stop the oppression as soon as you become white. And so this is what I’m piecing together, why my grandmother would want to marry a non-Native man, why my mom would want to marry a non-Native man. It’s these patterns of trying to almost stop being Indian and it’s interesting that I used the word Indian here...

Rose, in talking of her mother’s marriage to her non-First Nations step-father, spoke about patterns among the women in her family. She attributed the two generations, her mother and grandmother, marrying abusive non-First Nations men, to a sense of internalized racism. She stated the following:

... in terms of patterns that are repeated and in terms of looking at how the internalization of the feeling that you don’t deserve better or the internalization of the feeling that you don’t deserve to be treated any different than being treated like shit...

Rose shared that she felt that her mother experienced, “internalizing that low self-worth... and being a half-breed, she really felt like she didn’t matter in either society....” Rose also spoke about the lateral oppression that is common in First Nations communities and was common in her family. She defined lateral oppression as the oppressed oppressing the oppressed. Her mother’s internalized oppression also manifested in such a way that she often made derogatory comments about other Indigenous people while Rose was growing up. Rose further described how she too began to internalize some of these stereotypes and judgments about her people. In addition, Rose believes that her mother tried to make herself appear “as white as possible” in order to “stop the oppression.” Rose talked about this being a protective factor that her mother was trying to put in
place, to shelter her from the racism in society. In addition, she attributed this coping mechanism as being something she learned in Residential School in order to survive the ridicule and trauma.

Ann talked about her and her siblings’ experiences with racism in school while growing up. She shared the following:

...times at elementary when we did get teased for being Indian. It was more or less my brother and my sister, the little “ah, ah, ah” (tapping hand on mouth) jokes or whatever, even though we went to that elementary school for years and years, and everyone knew that we were siblings because I’m the fairer one. Like my sisters got darker straight hair and my brother is just a bit darker. I’m the fairest of the three of us. They would get picked on, but I wouldn’t.

Ann talked about how when they were picked on, her mother would come to their defense like a “mama lion” and try to protect them from racism. She really admired her mother for standing up for them and trying to give them a different life than she had growing up. Ann also talked about how her mother tried her best to make her family appear ‘white’. She described her childhood and their attempt to fit into mainstream society and shared, “if you see pictures of us, like we were just dressed up all pretty, we’ve got pig, you know our little, our hair done just right, same outfits, nice dress, white picket fence....”

Ann described her mother as having both a sense of pride and shame about her Indigenous heritage and stated:

There was a really, really strong sense of internalized racism for her, like her sense of... there was a shame, there was, like her self-esteem... like her esteem of herself was very low. Like everything she did was, was for us, like it was for her children.

Ann further described how her mother never did anything for herself, only for others. She attributes this to her low sense of self-worth and self-efficacy that was fostered in Residential School.
The racism that the women described having to deal with was difficult for them to cope with and reconcile. This caused them to have feelings of internalized racism, resulting in a sense of shame about their Indigenous ancestry and family members. This internalization was also transmitted to them intergenerationally from their parents, who experienced endless racism in Residential School.

Compromised Mental Wellness

Research indicates that difficulties with mental health or mental wellness were another effect attributed to Residential School. Residential Schools facilitated internal suffering and the inability to work through complex emotions. Additionally, enduring and/or witnessing abuse and violence has greatly contributed to survivors having their mental wellness compromised. The storytellers described many personal experiences and stories of their parents’ struggles with their mental wellness. Four main sub-themes emerged that include grief, depression, suicide, and substance misuse.

Grief

The high prevalence of death and ill health among Indigenous communities is a major issue that impacts the wellness of First Nations people. Many Residential School survivors suffer poor health and early deaths. Many survivors have issues with food and health because they did not receive the proper nutrition and education about eating well and taking care of one’s body. As a consequence, poverty, poor eating habits and other high risk health behaviors have been the result, which in turn cause many early deaths. Additionally, these learned behaviors have been transmitted intergenerationally to the children of survivors. The women in this study identified that the effect of grief and loss in their families has impacted them deeply.
Ann experienced a tremendous amount of grief after her mother’s suicide. She attributes her mother’s need to end her life as a result of wanting to stop remembering the pain and suffering that she experienced in Residential School. Ann was fifteen at the time of her death. She described what life was like for her the first few years after losing her mother:

...when she died, I was up in the Yukon visiting a friend of mine, so there was this... there was, there was huge guilt in her death for me... and... and I guess because there was that guilt, it was just, it turned for me to be a very self-destructive time in my life, ah the next two or three years of just, ya, just, self-destructive... promiscuity, drugs, alcohol, um just not treating myself very well at all.

...although I had started doing some of that grieving, with my mother’s... death... I think that was also just at an intellectual level. It wasn’t until... um maybe I was about twenty... I think it was about just five years ago, I think I was about twenty-seven or twenty-eight. But I really, started to go deeper with that and allow myself to feel, ah... all the emotions that were attached to, to her death.

...this was four or five years ago that the guilt was still the first thing that came up with my mom, that I still felt that there was something that I could have done to stop her from killing herself. So um, ya to think I carried that for almost fifteen years....

Ann described the process of letting go of the guilt and grief she was experiencing as “peeling the layers.” After fifteen years of carrying this pain, she has been able to let her mother go and stop feeling responsible for her mother’s death.

Zoe described the ongoing grief that she faces, due to the high numbers of deaths in her community. She shared the following about this perpetual grief:
I could say too, a lot of funerals... of really, of people that I really, really, really, really, really cared for... dying too young in our community and all the epidemics are so true. Um it hits home... and like the changes again we need to make in our world, like with our kids, the next generation... hopefully not having them have to see so much. But of course, we know that'll be another seven generations before we see our work making improvements.

For Zoe attending many, many funerals every year has become a part of life, although her insights into community change and wellness are also at the forefront.

Eliza described the many losses she has experienced and the impact these have had on her and her family. Her father died when she was six months old and she described how her family pitied her all throughout her life after he passed away. She shared that she was then referred to as “that poor baby without a father.” Her mother carried grief over the loss of her husband throughout Eliza’s childhood and would often weep when she had been drinking, crying for him. Eliza also spoke about the impact that her grandmother’s death had on her because of the closeness of their relationship. She also described the impact of the loss of her nephew to suicide.

Tina shared about her intense feelings of grief after her mother passed away. She spoke about being by her side as she died in the hospital:

I had to hold her hand, hold her hand while she was dying (crying) and I... And I couldn’t, I didn’t know what to say. I couldn’t find the right words. I couldn’t, I didn’t know how to comfort her. But still, she wouldn’t cry. You know, she was, she was just laying there and she knew, she knew she was gonna die. And I just, I remember telling her, it was almost like I went into a child-like state and I was saying, “mommy I’m so sorry (crying).” And then I held her hand and we called her brothers down and she didn’t go for, I think it was three days. By the third day I was so exhausted. And then ah, I went into the TV room at the hospital. I don’t know why for some reason, I went into the TV
room for like two hours, trying to sleep. But I, I just got up for no reason, I just got up.

And I went to check on her and she was taking her last breath, her last two breaths. And then she was gone. And it was so peaceful, the room. I just wanted her to not suffer anymore.

Tina also spoke about the intense emotions and feelings of grief she experienced after having met her uncle and grandfather for the first time in her Gitksan community. She shared that she cried and cried after finding her family for the first time. She described the day they were reunited:

And we just sat down and we ordered something to eat and I said, I couldn’t hold it back any longer and I just started to cry. And then there was other people coming in the restaurant and my uncle, I started to understand that one phrase he was saying in Indian, su or he was saying “ah this is Sandy’s daughter” cuz I could hear him say Sandy. And then he’d say ooks or something, meaning daughter. And they all would say “ohhhh” and then come over and talk to me and look at me and tell me “oh you look like your mother.”

And I just cried and cried that whole day. And they all spoke Indian.

Tina started grieving the loss of family that she never knew she had after this meeting. She continues to struggle with the loss of her mother, although she shared that it gets easier to speak of her and her death as time passes.

**Depression**

The women described their parents’ suffering with depression as a result of their experiences in Residential School. They pointed out that the torment in the Schools and their inability to speak about their experiences contributed to their depression. The storytellers’ also spoke about how they were impacted by having a depressed parent and how they too, in some cases, have experienced depression as well.
Ann described the pervasiveness of depression in her family. She spoke of three generations of depression, including her grandmother, her mother and herself. Ann shared:

...my grandmother had been taken away from the community because she suffered from depression... and she spent most of the rest of her days in a mental institute on the mainland in Vancouver. And I’ve always blamed that to the Residential School partly as well because all her children were taken away from her.

My mother committed suicide, that was how she died and I knew that she struggled with depression growing up and um we’d been witness to attempts of suicide in our life when we were quite young.

Ann spoke about her own struggles with depression, which were related to her feelings of grief and sadness. She described having a difficult time taking care of herself as her sense of self-worth was so low.

Zoe described how the family violence she endured has impacted her. She spoke about how depression was an outcome of the abuse and has significantly affected her life. Zoe shared:

...like I said you’re always healing and right now I’m in a healing place. You know dealing with depression from being an abused woman... I know that’s what that is all about. Because after a long period of time of not having any control it’s gotta do something to you, right?

Zoe continues to struggle with the experience of depression today and she continues to work towards overcoming it.

Tina shared about her personal experiences with depression while growing up and as an adult. She shared that she never felt she was “normal” and felt “messed up” inside. She shared that she, “always felt so alone, so rejected, so ugly...” She never had a connection to a mother.
figure or anyone to confide in. Today, she struggles with overcoming these same feelings, but has gained many new ways to cope with depression and her emotions.

**Suicide**

Suicide was described as both a direct result and an intergenerational effect of Residential School. Many factors such as loss, disconnection, trauma, substance misuse and compromised mental wellness contributed to the incidents of suicide in the women’s families. These factors are attributed to being effects of the Schools and their aftermath.

Ann shared about her mother’s chronic tendency towards suicide while Ann was growing up:

...you know she quite often spoke about how life wasn’t fair and um... you know and being suicidal. Like, I think I said too is that she was always suicidal and she always spoke of death. She always let us know where she wanted to be buried and um... just kind of, just always spoke about life, how hard this life was. Um... and though I imagine life would have been difficult, whether there was a Residential School there or not, it would have been a different kind of difficult. There would have been a stronger connection to her siblings and the family....

Ann and her siblings were witness to suicide attempts in the home and listened to their mother’s sad stories on late nights. Ann spoke about how her mother did the best that she could as a parent, but her suffering won in the end and she was never able to take steps toward healing her past.

Eliza described the impact of her teenage nephew’s suicide two years ago on her and her family:

When my sister’s boy died, that was the first of our kids. He was going to be a hockey player. He was the perfect boy. Didn’t drink, athlete, he was gonna be in the NHL. He
was such a good hockey player, that’s what we thought. Handsome young man, laughing, good boy. We found him hanging in the shed, he hung himself. All our kids, it was hard. Hard for us to see our own boys, our own babies packing or carrying a coffin. I thought my sister was going to go off the deep end, lose her mind completely. And in my heart of hearts, I was just trying my best to try to harness everything that I learned from my grandmother for her.

Tina shared about her adolescence and her struggles with feeling suicidal. Tina shared about her experiences with coping with thoughts of wanting to end her life:

I knew when I was about fifteen or probably thirteen, that I needed some type of healing. I needed to reach out to counselors because I would get really upset and down and I’d think about suicide. Like killing myself before… and I knew that if I didn’t reach out and speak to a counselor or something that I might even do that. And I didn’t want to do that to my brother, my little brother. So, I didn’t want to leave him.

The assistance of counselors helped Tina to overcome her feelings of suicide and she shared that she was then able to begin her healing journey.

Substance Misuse

Substance misuse is pervasively attributed to being a coping mechanism for many Residential School survivors and their children. Many First Nations people have used drugs and alcohol as a means to numb the painful memories of their time spent in Residential School. As a consequence, this experience of substance misuse has also been transmitted intergenerationally. Misusing substances was described by the women as being a means for their parents’ to cope with the painful memories of Residential School.
Ann spoke about growing up amongst substance misuse in her home. She described how her mother drank quite a lot and also struggled with prescription drugs as well. Ann shared about what it was like growing up with alcoholism:

...she wasn’t a mother to me in a lot of ways. There was a lot of times that she embarrassed me in public when she was drunk, you know, there was, you know for those things, that it’s ok for me to feel that and then be able to let it go.

As a young woman, Ann went through a period that she identifies as a self-destructive time where she misused substances heavily after her mother died.

Tina spoke about her mother’s alcoholism, which she attributed to being a result of her experiences in Residential School. She shared, “it was her awful memories of Residential School that made her drink to ease the pain of her childhood memories.” Tina spoke about how the only time she ever saw her mother sober was when she was in the hospital dying.

This theme of compromised mental wellness was described by the women as significantly impacting themselves and their families. The most profound aspects of this theme included the difficulty in dealing with grief, depression, suicide and substance misuse while growing up. As adults they also shared about how they continued to be affected by these difficulties.

The effects of Residential Schools that the storytellers described as having a destructive influence on them and their families are deeply rooted and have caused them significant anguish. Each of the five main areas of impact identified is related and linked to each other. To reiterate, these areas include disconnection from Indigenous identity and heritage, parenting difficulties, living in silence, experiences of racism; and compromised mental wellness. It is clear that the destruction the Residential Schools caused was transmitted intergenerationally to these six women. They had a lot of emotional distress to cope with as children in their homes. As adults, they have continued to feel the effects of Residential Schools.
Steps Taken Towards Healing

Six healing themes emerged from the women's stories; four of the themes contain sub-themes. The themes include gaining post-secondary education, learning about and connecting with their Indigenous identity, attending therapy and healing programs, working towards forgiveness and understanding of their parents' experience in Residential School, changing family patterns and being helpers in their communities.

Gaining Post-Secondary Education

Obtaining post-secondary education was identified by the women as being significant to their healing. The learning that they gained in college and university contributed to their gaining an understanding of their parents' experience in Residential School, understanding the historical context of their people and the redefining of their world views. The two sub-themes included in this section are learning history, and overcoming internalized racism.

Learning History

The women spoke about learning the history of the colonization of Indigenous people as being significant to their healing. They identified that their introduction to learning about historic and contemporary oppression did not occur until they were adults, primarily while they were gaining post-secondary education.

Rose shared the significance of her learning about colonization in her post-secondary education in terms of her healing. She identified:

...my schooling totally impacts my learning and my awareness of how much I can theorize about what happened. So a lot of the stuff that I'm gonna share is, I feel like I
attribute to a lot of the education that I’ve had cause we don’t have that kind of education in the (public) school system about Residential Schools and what happened.

...in terms of like more mainstream education and also mainstream people knowing what happened, I feel there’s an entire lack of it. And it wasn’t until post-secondary schooling that I started making connections about the impact of the second-generation Residential School survivor.

Rose stated that she experienced a sense of shock when this learning process began, although it helped her to begin to seek out her identity. Rose described how she began to identify the resilience of First Nations women, both historically and in the present. She was then able to make personal connections in her family about the impacts of Residential Schools and gain a greater understanding of the internalized racism they endured.

Ann also stated that she received no education about Residential Schools or the history of colonization in public school. The first time Ann heard that Residential Schools existed was when she was nineteen years old when her brother was attending university. Her brother brought home a film about Residential Schools and they watched it together. Ann spoke about this memory and shared:

We were sitting at my dad’s and visiting and I had my daughter and my brother put this video in and it was to do with Residential School and I just, like that was when, that was a really big turning point for me because in my life... it felt... I don’t really think I was innocent at that age, but in the sense it, it, I just... my view of the world took a complete one-eighty.

I was sort of on this mission after that to ah, ah learn more. So, I, that day or the next day went to the public library and picked up some more books to learn more.
Ann further stated that a few years after this, she went to college and found that “the healing really began for me when I began post-secondary education....” She described the anger and feelings of sorrow that surfaced for her at this time. She described how painful this process was for her and how she worked through it:

And I don’t know how many papers I wrote, but it was just kind of a blood, sweat and tears where I would drive to school just in tears and drive home in tears and for a couple of years. So it gave me that time to just process and be in my car and I was taking you know five classes, all First Nations courses.

Ann further identified that this writing process helped her to release her anger and that she found it to be therapeutic.

Flora described how she, too, had not had any education in public school about the history of her people’s experience of colonization. She spoke about her first experience learning about Residential Schools, while her mother described her experiences at St. Michael’s Residential School:

And I was overwhelmed by it because I was very naïve when I was eighteen and I didn’t know about Residential Schools. I knew that there were Boarding Schools, but I didn’t see a distinction between the Residential School and the Boarding School situation. So, I was shocked; I didn’t even know this had happened to Native people. So... and maybe that’s what made it easier for her (mother) to tell me because my response was just sort of silent, sort of deer in the headlights type thing. I didn’t really have an emotional reaction at that time. Um, so she took about four hours to tell me about what her experience was.

Flora further described how in university she gained a greater knowledge and understanding of Indigenous people’s histories of oppression. She shared that writing papers was helpful in processing this knowledge. Flora described this process:
I've wrote some, written some papers about, not specifically about the Residential School, but, I took a course on women’s studies. And it focused on inequalities and gender and racism and it sort of viewed how they’re all intertwined and that was a very liberating course for me to take. I’d never taken a course like that before and the papers, we were encouraged to write, were really um, encouraged us to examine in our own lives and apply it to greater society. You know these inequalities and, and it was a wonderful experience. So writing those papers really, really helped... and reading other literature... especially Black literature by female Black authors and my late teens early twenties was a real eye opener and I could really see a lot of the similarities and their experiences. That was a great comfort to me, encouraged me to sort of go on, to learn more...

Tina shared about the significance of her attending college and learning the historical context of Indigenous people as well. Going to college was empowering for Tina and contributed greatly to her healing. Tina shared how she was looking for answers from her mother, but was unable to get the information she wanted. Tina talked about this time in her life and shared:

I went to college and I started to empower myself even more about why, why did she leave us? If I'm not going to find out directly from her, then I want to know historically why. So I started to learn about, ah the Indian Act and Residential Schools. I started to study First Nations studies and Natives from my own territory. And I studied my cultural ways and how we once were a healthy people before contact, before the arrival of the Europeans and colonialism. I started to empower myself and I found that, that was very healing. I learned about how she didn’t have a choice or her mother didn’t have a choice. My mother was taken from her mother and put into Residential School.
Overcoming Internalized Racism

The process of identifying and overcoming racist and internalized feelings and beliefs about oneself and one’s people is important. As one journeys through this process, a sense of pride develops, replacing the internalized beliefs with positive images and perceptions. The storytellers’ described their own personal process of overcoming their feelings of internalized racism and how they came to feel proud of their identities as a result.

Rose shared how her new-found learning about the history of colonization prompted her to begin to critically examine her worldview and the patterns within her family. She described this internal process:

...when I started becoming a young person, to be able to kind of formulate my own thought or critically look at stuff and I swear it’s probably post-secondary again, like early college years, where I started challenging. Ok they’re not just a bunch of... trying to stop the lateral oppression and I tried to stop looking at my own people negatively and... try to put the sources of... and not blame my mother or not blame my grandmother, but to try to identify the sources of it. Talking about power, control, dominance, oppression, patriarchy, like the Indian Act...

Rose spoke about gaining an understanding of her grandmother’s internalized racism. She described this as a protective factor. She stated she was able to reframe her understanding of her grandmother’s actions and shared that by “not passing down the language, not knitting, that mirroring non-Natives were all pieces of resistance.”

Ann spoke about how she began to understand her mother’s death and behaviors upon learning about the legacy of Residential Schools. She shared, “The more I’ve come to learn up until now has really made me understand a lot of my mother’s patterns growing up.” She was then able to relate to her mother’s need to be ‘white’ and make a different life for her children away from their community.
Tina described how she felt a sense of pride about her Indigenous identity when she began to attend her partner’s Coast Salish ceremonies. She shared about the significance of attending Longhouse ceremonies:

The longhouse is a place where I fit in and feel really proud to be Native. The Longhouse gives me the power to believe in myself and to believe we Natives used to practice our traditions a long time ago. Watching my partner makes me proud and I take pride in the person I chose to be with because he doesn’t care what anyone says; he still puts his paint on and he’ll go down there and he’ll drum and he’ll sing. That’s something I might do, maybe next year, is practice Longhouse Traditions.

The theme of gaining a post-secondary education was described by the women in this study as being significant to them getting started on their healing journeys. The experience of learning the history of the colonization of their people prompted them to begin to be able to understand the suffering their parents’ endured in Residential School. This also contributed to them gaining a greater understanding of themselves, such as overcoming their sense of internalized racism. Writing was identified as an outlet for processing the newfound knowledge about the colonization of their people.

Learning about and Connecting with Indigenous Identity

It is apparent from the results of this study that the women’s Indigenous identities were non-existent in some cases and compromised in others. All of the women described their processes of learning about and making connections with their identities as adults. Two sub-themes that emerged in this section include connecting with family, community, culture and spirituality, and the influence of role models and mentors.
Connecting with Family, Community, Culture and Spirituality

The women described making connections with family, the Indigenous community, culture and spirituality as adults as being significant to their healing processes. These connections were not possible for many of the women to make as children or young adults due to the disconnection they had from their people and their families. Taking these steps toward connecting has contributed to the women reconciling emotions and the impacts related to having a parent who was a survivor of Residential School.

Rose shared how upon identifying her internalized racism, she no long felt the need to strive towards being ‘white’. Instead she started “trying to embrace the culture...” and her traditional ceremonies. Rather she engaged in a process of challenging the Western ideals that had been forced upon her and redefining her world view.

Rose described her process in connecting for the first time with various members of her family. Gaining this connection was significant for her ability to heal her past and move forward. Rose’s mother kept the identity of her father from her during her childhood and adolescence. She told an amazing story about when she met her father for the first time, by accident:

And so we were in the beer and wine store, getting her a bottle of wine and we were walking out and I noticed someone who looked like my uncle. And I said, “Are you a George?” And he’s like, “ya the one and only!” You know he answered like (laughs) he answered like really, like really cocky! And I’m like “oh!” And he’s like, “who are you?” And I’m like, “oh I’m Allyn and Robyn’s daughter” and he’s like “oh ya.” And so he’s like, “do you know Rose?” And I’m like, “do you know my mom because I’m Rose!” And he goes, “I’m your father!” And he grabs me and hugs me!
Rose and her father went to his home and got to know each other a bit that day. She described this as a very significant connection that she has made as a part of her healing. Furthermore, she spoke about how meeting her father was a gift from the Creator.

Rose also shared how she and her mother have been working on healing and learning together, redefining their relationship as mother and daughter. Talking with her father also helped her to gain a further understanding of her mother as he shared with her about his relationship with her mother. Rose’s dad shared memories that her mother had never spoken of and it was comforting for her to learn that they loved and cared deeply for each other.

Rose shared about her identity and this informs the importance of having balance in her life. She shared how she uses “the Medicine Wheel to kind of, get in touch with balance and where I am for balance and that’s part of my healing… in terms of trying to focus my life on my physical, my mental, emotional, my spiritual and just connecting.…” She turns to her spiritual beliefs as a tool for getting grounded and gaining direction in her life. Her Indigenous identity helps her take her “next breath” and keep on working towards her goals. She shared how her mother is a great source of strength for her. Rose has learned her traditional values and beliefs, and her spirituality is a source of comfort and guidance.

Ann described how she always had a spiritual connection growing up. She shared, “I always remember talking to, to God, you know I always had that sense even as a child as long as I can remember that there was always something that I spoke to.” As an adult, she was able to make this same connection, but through a cultural perspective that still involves prayer. Ann shared her thoughts on community healing through culture:

…the basis of healing, from our community, was that we need to return to our cultural beliefs and the values need to come together stronger so community and… reclaiming things that were taken from us from the Residential School.
Ann described the significance of the relationship she developed with her aunt after her mother’s death. She shared, “she has been really instrumental in my healing because of missing sort of having that mother figure in my life. My auntie has been really strong for that and in my journey of becoming connected to my First Nations family and community and culture.” She also spoke about how in university she made many connections with Indigenous people in the community. Ann described making these connections as something that she needed to do in order to take care of herself. She developed relationships and began to attend ceremonies, which contributed to her being able to connect with herself and process a lot of her emotions.

Ann described her identity as being formed as a result of now knowing and practicing her culture’s values and beliefs. She shared about the strength of her family and its influence on shaping her identity. Furthermore, she spoke about the significance of making a connection to her “spiritual self” and to the Creator. She shared about her spiritual beliefs:

And um, when I, whenever I pray like um, you know I pray to the Creator, but I pray to my ancestors. You know I pray to my mother and I just feel, I feel her with me...

Ann concluded her interview by sharing her thoughts on community healing. She spoke about the importance of Indigenous people returning to traditional values, beliefs and practices as a means for achieving wellness.

Zoe shared about the significance of connecting with her father as an adult as being integral to her healing process. She explained:

And we’re pretty good friends now, he calls me all the time now, where he’s actually admitted to me that he was sorry, for what happened and that he did abandon me. And I think once he acknowledged and recognized that and said that to me, I was able to just let it all go. So you know, and that’s when he seemed to let it all go too and sort of talk about it a bit.
...now I see that because now that my dad is instilling values and beliefs in me and talking to me about everything and anything I want to talk about. And giving me that time when I ask him for it now. Whereas, before I used to be afraid to ask him, it's like I really need you... like I never wanted to tell him that. I always wanted to come off really strong and able to live without him, but really all and all, like I love my parents regardless of what's happened when I was growing up.

He really teaches me a lot... about keeping on going on, like you know being so resilient. Like he's been through things I can't even imagine.

When Zoe began connecting with her father, she also began connecting with his children whom she had not had a close relationship with growing up, which has been meaningful for her.

Eliza described an experience connecting with her mother as an adult, when her mother wrote and made amends to her. Eliza shared:

...well I was just a young person and she wrote me a letter, I was twenty... ah I hate doing the math, but I was very young, twenty-one or so. She wrote me a letter and she said she was apologizing to me for not being a good mother. And I go 'holy crap, where is this coming from?' And of course I had cleaned up my life. I stopped messing around too and quit drinking. And ah, I was straightening out my life at the time, when I got the letter... and I wrote her back and I said 'you know I've never seen you anything but a really strong woman that had a lot of bad things happen and I always thought you were very strong for everything being able to do everything that you did... um and I never blamed you.' And I never did, I never blamed her. It was just, I could see that there was a set of circumstances that were quite aside from her being a bad person, I never saw her as a bad person.

Making a connection with her mother was of importance to Eliza's healing in reconciling the impacts of having a mother who was not emotionally available to her as a child.
Eliza shared about her culture’s Creation story that was passed down to her from her grandmother because her mother was not able to do so. This story is important to her and she holds this belief dearly to her heart as it keeps her strong, rooted and connected to her culture. Learning about and understanding this story has been significant in Eliza’s ability to feel connected with her identity and spiritual beliefs which have been an integral component to her healing. She shared her Creation story:

And I think that the heart is my creation story. The creation story is who I am. It says that I might never know the truth of its end, I might not be alive to see us come around, but it says we will come around and be one people again. One day we will be one. And, how do I know that? Well, it’s believing in what you are told, my grandmother told me the story of who I am, where I come from. My story is long, but the short version... is ... there’s four levels of existence: (1) where people live; (2) where people live when they die; (3) where supernatural human beings live; and (4) where Creator lives. And I won’t even try to say that name in Carrier. But, when, from the beginning of time when people came to live on earth, the Creator gave us an animal cloak to put on and we used this cloak to float down to the place where were going to live as human beings. Take off that cloak and live our human being lives... four days after I die in my human being life now, what I know is I will travel back in time and along the way I will meet all my ancestors along the way to my first ancestor. And then when I get to her, I know my first ancestor is a woman, I will put that animal cloak on and float up to the place where people live when they die. So in the end, I am, we’re gonna be one people again. We’re all going to be together. There’s just a different level of existence that happens, it’s not a westernized version of the beginning, middle and end. It’s, we’re part of a bigger thing, so even though it looks like in our life that things are going to end, it’s not that way. It, even it doesn’t matter how bad it looks, one day we’re going to be together. What my grandmother said is that it looks
pretty bad. I know it looks pretty bad, but we’re going to be one people again, were gonna be all one people again. So you know you love all the people because we’re gonna be together again, one day. It’s not gonna be like this forever.

Eliza further spoke about her spiritual beliefs and the importance of having faith. She believes that this is the key to healing and that it needs to be reclaimed and practiced within the Indigenous community. Eliza talked about the different kinds of ceremonies that she is involved in, ones that help her to continue to have a strong faith. She described participating in a Jewish healing ceremony, Potlatches, Sundance’s and other ceremonies.

Eliza spoke about how being a spiritual person has contributed to her healing and wellness. Having this connection has helped her to continue moving forward and gaining a greater understanding of herself. Eliza shared another story about a spiritual dream she had about an owl. She described telling her dream to her sister on the way back from a Sundance:

And my dream is, I’m standing in a pool of water, on the edge of a pool of water and I have bare feet. And I know it’s me cause I’m looking down and I can see my feet. And when I’m looking down, there’s this cedar dress. I know I have a cedar dress on. And there’s a really nice dark blue pool of water and there’s sunshine. I don’t know if it’s morning sun or evening sun. And then on the far side of the pool of water, it’s not really that big... there’s a rock face there and there’s an owl sitting on the rock face. And either the owl is singing to me or I’m singing with the owl, but we’re singing. He’s either teaching me a song or whatever. And I had this thing going on, on the song it up there... anyway I decide to tell my sister this story. So then I had to describe the owl to her and as soon I say the owl, out of the prairie grass this owl comes swooping out. It’s the biggest span, this owl swoops out, goes across the road, swoops across... to the other side where the prairie grass is, barely touched, his wings barely touched that. Comes up over the, the hood of the truck, I’m driving. And his wings go like this (gestures), you know how the
feathers brush you off, it was like this (gestures) on the window. He came over the hood and like this, over me, his feathers. I felt like, the owl was brushing me. And as I was doing this, of course I’m stunned, I stopped talking...

Eliza shared that this dream showed her that even though her grandmother has passed on to the spirit world, that she is still connected to her today. Knowing this keeps her strong and on a healing path.

Flora first connected with her mother at the age of eighteen. Her mother shared with Flora her entire life story, telling her specific details of her experiences in Residential School. Although this was the first and only conversation they had of this sort, it sparked the beginning of a mother and daughter connection and her healing journey. Flora then also began meeting and connecting with her half-sisters whom she had never met. She shared about this significance of her connections with her siblings:

Um, but mostly I think maintaining a relationship with my um, half-sisters and our conversations about what our lives are like now and how they differ, but how they’re the same. Um, have been really inspiring to me, especially my youngest sister, she’s very, she has a very buoyant spirit and... ya the conversations we have about... she has a great understanding of what happened to my mother and so... my relationship with her has been very healing.

Flora also spoke about connecting with other Residential School survivors as being important to her healing process. She described this mutual sharing:

Well I, I talk about her experiences (her mother’s), as much as I can, where it’s appropriate. Especially with other people who have gone to that Residential School. I let them know that my mother went there and I’ve had good conversations with people who are survivors, like James went to the same one. And he remembers her and I think it’s healing, not just for me to hear similar stories, but I think it’s... I also get the sense that
it’s healing for, you know the people that I’ve talked to... that there’s still survivors and that their children are around and I just get that sense that it’s really a positive thing for them, that you know, we haven’t forgotten. I think that’s the main gist I get from it is that, I think that would be the worst case scenario for everyone involved, especially the survivors... that people forget... what they went through and stuff.

Flora described how connecting with her mother, sisters and other community members has been significant to the formation of her Indigenous identity.

Tina began to get to know her mother when she became pregnant with her own daughter. She spoke about how she felt it was important to connect with her mother so that her daughter would know her family. Tina shared:

My mother wasn’t able to get better and I went to meet her when I was pregnant with my own daughter. So that my daughter would know who she was because I didn’t want her to go through all that sadness, that sadness I had gone through, as a child not knowing my mom. I wanted her to completely feel that she had family. Although her grandma was sick, she still had family, not to wonder about it.

Tina further shared that her pregnancy sparked a need to explore her Indigenous identity as well. She stated, “I knew I needed to find out who I was. I knew that I was Native, but it wasn’t good enough. I needed to know where I was from.”

Tina shared the story about meeting her uncle and grandfather for the first time. Making this connection with her family was integral to her healing process and gaining an understanding of her identity and where she comes from. She shared about meeting her grandfather:

And then there was this little man crossing the street and my uncle started speaking in Indian. He was walking closer and closer and closer. And it was my own eyes looking back at me. The shape of my eyes, the shape of my brother’s eyes. And I couldn’t... and he was just as tall as I was.
Tina met other family and community members that day and they all remembered her mother. This experience in her Gitksan community was very significant for Tina’s healing and growth as an Indigenous woman.

Influence of Role Models and Mentors

The women described the significance that Indigenous role models and mentors have had on their lives. This positive influence greatly contributed to the storytellers’ healing and wellness, as they received much needed guidance, strength and teachings. These factors were significant to the development of their identities as First Nations women.

Ann spoke about the importance and influence of her relationship with her aunt. Her aunt taught her cultural teachings, along with being a source of support. Ann’s aunt acted as a mother figure as well after her mother’s death. She also described some healers and helpers from her Kwakwaka’wakw community that helped her to work through her painful memories surrounding her mother’s suicide.

Zoe described the positive influence of her grandparents while growing up. She shared about this influence: “I think that’s why I’m able grow and move on... be in a job and take care of my children, as I was taken care of.” Zoe shared a positive memory from her childhood about fishing with her grandparents:

...being with my mom’s mom and dad... gathering fish or going berry picking and camping and fishing. There was one particular time we went fishing, I didn’t have my own fishing rod but everyone else did. So, I was really upset. So my grandpa made me a homemade fishing rod! And everyone else had brand new fishing rods, except for me and I was the one that caught all the fish! With the homely fishing rod!

Zoe also described her mother as being a great source of strength for her.
Eliza spoke about the abundance of love she received from her paternal grandmother growing up. She told many stories of her grandmother passing teachings to her in addition to the nurturing she received. She shared about this transmission of knowledge:

And it was because I had all that love, I had all that attention... it broadened... I guess my mind to other things, my grandmother. And that’s where I think the crux of it all is; she somehow was able to transmit to me knowledge that helped her, that’s not just any knowledge, that’s knowledge, that’s traditional knowledge.

The theme of learning about and connecting with Indigenous identity was recognized as a profound aspect of the women’s healing journeys. They took steps to gain a sense of connection to their families, communities, culture and spirituality which helped them to form their identities and sense of self. The women described the positive influence role models and mentors have had on their lives and discussed processes for gaining and retaining a connection to their culture and communities. They further described the meaning attached to these relationships and how they cherish them because of the significance they have had in helping them to develop into strong Indigenous women.

**Attending Therapy and Healing Programs**

The importance of journeying through therapeutic processes was identified by all of the women as integral to their healing journeys. The women also spoke about working towards forgiveness as a major issue they addressed in therapy, to forgive those who caused them harm or hurt. A sub theme within this section is the importance of sharing their stories.

Rose shared that upon beginning to learn the historical context of the impact of colonization, she also began to work towards healing from her childhood abuse. Rose spoke about the growth and healing she went through in individual and group therapy. She shared about her experience in therapy:
...that got me started to look at my, my history of childhood sexual abuse and started planting all the seeds for, for the healing... journaling and confronting my abuser’s. She (the therapist) used some Gestalt and just some techniques that I really still value right now.

Rose described this process as contributing to her ability to release feelings of blame that she had towards her mother and grandmother for the decisions they made. She was then able to see the resilience they had as strong Indigenous women instead. Rose and her mother were then able to build a new relationship together.

Ann has been through individual therapy and First Nations trauma healing programs. She shared her feelings of guilt about her mother’s death. She felt for many years that she could have prevented it and therapy helped her be able to release this burden. In addition, Ann shared that she was plagued with grief and the process helped her to be able to accept her mother’s death. She shared, “if you really love someone you need to let them go. I was just really, really trying to hang on tight to my mother.” The healers she worked with assisted her in being able to let her mother rest and to forgive her for leaving her as a child.

Ann went into depth about her struggles with reconciling her feelings towards her mother and herself. She shared her thoughts on this process:

Allowing myself, to forgive myself for being self-destructive... it’s just the layers of the healing and just allowing myself to go through that...

I really struggled with allowing myself to cry. I guess to this day I think it was ingrained by the time I was seven...
But now I’m going back to deal with childhood stuff and I feel like there’s still some of that, to go, to deal with some of the teenage stuff. But it’s true, like there’s like different layers and I can go a little deeper each time.

Eliza shared about her experiences in therapy as well. She described her first experience in therapy:

I went to counseling; I never been to any group counseling. I was gonna try that to see what it’s like, that seemed popular around. I remember being sixteen and knowing I needed help soon. So I looked in the phone book and called somebody up. I don’t even know how he got paid. I don’t know why he accepted me as a client; I don’t remember doing any of that stuff. I just remember I was going to school in Vancouver and I was thinking I can’t make it. I can’t make it unless I get help. So I’ve been to therapy.

Eliza described this ability to recognize the need to seek out help as being “unique”. She stated that when she experienced feelings of being “flooded” and when life seemed “unmanageable”, she turned to counselors for support and healing.

Flora also described the significance of seeking out therapy for her healing process. She shared briefly about her experience in therapy:

I also see a psychiatrist, as well, and that’s been another avenue for me to explore more in depth my history and my mother’s history and how it all intertwines. It’s good.

This personal exploration of how her history impacts the present has been integral for her to move forward on her healing path towards wellness.

Tina’s experience in therapy and healing programs has been instrumental in her ability to reconcile her feelings around not having her mother growing up and her passing to the spirit world. Tina began seeking out counseling at the age of thirteen when she was suicidal. Tina spoke about this time in her childhood and described her reaching out:
For me healing came early as a teenager. I always knew that I had to start somewhere with some kind of counseling because I knew, I always thought oh I'm not normal. I'm not like the other kids. The other kids are normal and I'm, I'm so messed up.

She also shared, “I reached out and went to a lot of therapy when I first had my daughter. I went to a program called Choices, where I spent six months.” Tina recently began attending therapy again with a psychologist, which helped her to begin to take better care of herself and continue to move forward on her healing journey.

Sharing Their Story

The importance of sharing one’s story of struggle and healing was described by the women as being another step they took towards wellness that was significant. The process of telling their stories and having them be witnessed by others was described as an empowering step taken. Additionally, reading and hearing other people’s stories of healing was important, and writing was identified as another factor contributing to their having the strength to share their story.

Ann spoke about sharing her story with others, in addition to reading other’s stories. She shared that talking and sharing with other children of Residential School survivors has been helpful to her healing. Ann spoke about the importance of sharing her story:

I think that's been another, just in sharing, like in sharing... and being able to speak about it. Like I haven't and it depends on the day, like depending on where I am, I can be in a day where I'll just weep and weep and weep about it and days where I can't, but... there was a lot of different circles that I've been a part of and shared, shared my experience and my loss and the grief and sadness that I carry, from my mother.
Ann also shared that writing was a means through which she processed a lot of her emotions while attending post-secondary education.

Zoe spoke about the significance of sharing her experiences with a therapist and with friends and family. She stated the need she felt to tell her story and release the emotions attached to her experiences. This sharing has helped her to be able to move forward and live life in a healthy way.

Tina shared about how telling her story in the Choices Program was a means for her to release her pain. Tina described this experience:

For six months I went into this Choices Program. It was like a job from Monday to Friday. And in this program, most of us as grown women with children would talk about our mothers or the way we were raised. And through hearing our stories in a circle setting we would talk about our reasons for sharing our stories. So through that program I started to release some of the fear that I had, some of my fears that... I would not succeed in life because I had no mother. I started to heal my heart through this program. I started my journey to forgiveness.

The importance of going through therapeutic processes and healing programs was described by the six women as being important for them to be able to move forward and let go of past hurt. Furthermore, they described the process of sharing their stories as being empowering for them and a vital part of their healing process.

**Working Towards Forgiveness and Understanding**

Forgiveness and understanding were described by the women as being of importance to their healing journeys. They identified that carrying blame against those that have hurt them or caused them distress was not something that they wanted to continue doing. The women
identified their processes for working towards understanding and forgiveness, and stressed the significance of this aspect of healing.

Rose spoke about how she felt it was very important for her to forgive her mother and grandmother for their mistakes, upon recognizing her own and their internalized racism. She spoke about her need to try to understand what her mother experienced in Residential School and how that impacted her decisions and parenting. Once she could make sense of her family patterns and behaviors, she could then forgive them for their mistakes and accept them for who they are as people. Rose shared about her identification of her mother’s and grandmother’s resilience, which helped her to be able to forgive them:

...I see it as a, as a safety in terms of the immediate in terms of um resiliency or being resistent, but it has created sooo much turmoil. And there was, and unfortunately not having like the educational piece, the blame only went to the lateral piece... the blame only went from my mom to my grandma and from my grandma to... like it didn’t go beyond that to kinda go, okay let’s look at and I’m being real theoretical here, but you know being post modern, you wanna say take it to a different level and look at all the aspects that may have influenced and affected the oppression. But my grandmother wasn’t being stingy with her knowledge and just not wanting to share it with her children... so the blame isn’t just like um new to my mom or from my mom to my grandma...

Rose described her process for no longer blaming her family for the choices that they made. She spoke about how she began to shift the blame to the source, to the sources of oppression. Rose shared about this world view shift:

...it wasn’t until I feel like I got into well my own healing from my abuse, but also post-secondary and an understanding of what really happened for example in Oka and started kind of conceptualizing... ok and targeting where these messages came from and
not just being like putting down my mom for, for those messages... really putting it to the source of where those messages could be coming from.

...and not blame my mother or not blame my grandmother, but try to identify sources of it, talking about power, control, dominance, oppression, patriarchy, like the Indian Act, like were they really trying put... and I still feel like I’m, I am still working on that and trying to ah put the connections back to where they belong...

...like looking though a whole new lens and the more education that I get, the more it just opens that much more reflection, healing, that much more... removing from the individual and really looking at it in a more... more of a macro level. And just internal self-blame and ‘it’s just my fault’, ‘it’s just me, it’s just my mom or it’s just grandma’. Taking it out of that context and looking at in more of a broader... level.

This process of shifting blame for Rose enabled her to move forward with her healing and begin to reformulate her relationship with her mother.

Ann spoke about her need to work towards forgiving her mother for her inability to be a parent at times and for taking her life. Ann shared, “There was just ways that she wasn’t there, as a mother and to be able to just forgive her for that.” Ann also stated, “it was my anger at her for leaving... so it was... and up at Tsa-Kwa-Luten it was the follow up to that, really just forgiving her.” Ann also described how she had to forgive herself for not being able to save her mother and for her own self-destructiveness. Ann explained:

...and I think that, that’s a place that more recently in my healing that I’m coming to is... the starting with just really grieving with her death and, and forgiving myself or just ah, ah... of coming to the place of not feeling that guilt. Like that was the first step in it and then it was just going through the emotions of anger and sorrow, which still come up.
Like, there, it’s been more than seventeen years now since her death. But I mean, every
now and then I miss her and there’s certain times of the year where I think about her and
I’ll be sad. But it’s not overwhelming and I know that it’s okay every now and then to just
feel that. Not judge myself for that and just, just feel it.

Allowing myself to forgive myself for being self-destructive, that um... it’s just the layers
of the healing and just allowing myself to go through that...

Zoe spoke about her need to work towards forgiving her father for not being in her life
while growing up. She described how she was able to do this and let go of her negative feelings
towards him after he told her he was sorry for not being a father to her. Zoe shared about the shift
in her perceptions of her father:

But I think also because I’ve changed my thinking and I’ve accepted him, where he’s at
and not where I want him to be!

It took me a while to work on that, to accept him where he’s at and not try and change
him. Like for so long I was trying to make him be the perfect dad and, and he is the
perfect dad, he’s just his way, the perfect dad!

For Zoe, forgiveness involves acceptance and understanding her father’s history and the struggles
he has been through.

Zoe further described her need to no longer blame herself or her father for not being in her
life and also to not blame her children’s father for abusing her and not being a father to their
children. She shared about her process in stopping blaming herself and others:

...I used to blame everyone else for everything. But as I learned to read more books about
self-help books, too people, people around me would offer these books that I could read.
And I had some friends that were in AA too. And they really taught me about alcoholism
and how I used to blame myself for everything, like I thought I had control over these things that were happening to me with my ex.

Zoe spoke about how she was able to let go of the anger, understand and no longer blame her father and ex-partner:

So I’ve learned to have a lot of compassion for him (her ex-partner), which is really weird, having compassion for someone I used to hate with my whole heart!! I hated him so much! I kinda felt that way about my dad too... like there’s parallels with the two. But my dad is actually a better person in a lot of ways. But I know he (her ex-partner) is just struggling; it’s not as though he’s all bad, like he’s really charming and charismatic. And I just know he’s got his things he’s working on... it’s really weird to also admit and change my thinking where I used to say I don’t want nothing to do with him; I hate him... you know. But now again, to allow myself to say, yes I loved him deeply and yes I cared about him. And I do care what he thinks about the kids, you know. It took me a long time to be able to say that, and that’s the same way I was about my father. And now they’re both, now that I made that role with my dad go well, it’s easier to go that well with Scott.

Eliza shared many stories about how her grandmother taught her the teaching of forgiveness. In addition, she learned to not carry other people’s pain from her grandmother. She reflected on what she was taught:

And basically what she used to tell me is that if you are the first one to forgive, then all the other good stuff gets to happen. You just love all the people. So she was really good in forgiveness...

Eliza described how as a child she used to process her feelings and let go of them:

I would look for rocks. And um, and then I would choose, choose two different kind of rocks. And, what I would do is I would put all my bad feelings into the rocks and throw em into the creek. And then I would take the rocks, sometimes they were rough ones or
sometimes they were the smooooth ones. I don’t know what, but I used to choose them, there used to be a method to that madness. And then I would put my good feelings into these other rocks and carry them around with me for a while. And, I think I got that idea from a story my grandmother told me about how stones were alive.

But I remember her saying that they were alive and so I think that... ah this was a way of managing horrendous kind of trauma! You know what is a kid to do with it all? Right? And I took it to heart when she says, don’t carry it around. That meant, ever, like don’t carry it around ever. Because it doesn’t; no goods’ gonna come out of it. You had to find out what to do with it.

And I didn’t realize what I was doing, was just that I wasn’t carrying it around. You never forget some of this stuff that happens, but you are always, always managing it. In such a way as not to carry it.

Eliza was following her grandmother’s teachings of forgiving others and not hanging on to feelings of being hurt, teachings she still practices today.

Eliza’s grandmother also taught her to not blame others for their shortfalls. Eliza spoke about how she took this teaching to heart and has never blamed her mother for the ways she was not able to parent her. She shared:

And it’s because people loved me and people nurtured me, gave me a lot of that, that I think that I was able to kinda see the things that I did, I could see beyond what was wrong, and my grandmother would say things like ‘it’s easy to see things that’s wrong, it’s harder to see things that are right.’ So looking at my grandmother, looking at my mom, I always seen things that were right. She was a human being; you know, crap happened to her.
My grandmother kept on telling stories; she prayed with us everyday. She was telling us to love all the people. And she was the first one to forgive. Because we don’t really have time for the rest. We don’t have time to sit around and blame each other. And she did a lot of singing and her dancing. Her actions showed us how to love people because then we participate and help one another.

Learning to accept and not blame others has enabled Eliza to process and cope with a lot of hardship and move forward in her healing. The memory of her grandmother’s teachings keeps her moving along this path in a good way, not carrying negative emotions that she does not need.

Tina also spoke about the need she felt to forgive her mother for not being in her life and thereby keeping her away from her Gitksan people and family. Tina shared how she began this process in the Choices Program:

I learned about how she didn’t have a choice or her mother didn’t have a choice. My mother was taken from her mother and put into Residential School.

Tina described how she could then forgive her mother because she could see that she did the best she could in her life after suffering horrendous trauma in Residential School.

Tina briefly spoke about how she began to understand how her mother had no alternative but to give up her children. She began to recognize that her mother had endured so much pain and suffering that she was not able to be a parent, even though she loved her children very much. Tina shared about how she was able to no longer blame her mother for not raising her:

And I don’t think that she chose to give us up. It was just that she couldn’t back then. I didn’t know why she couldn’t reach out and find the help. Now I know that it was too hurtful.

Understanding and forgiving her mother’s behaviors and decisions has been a paramount step to Tina’s being able to move forward in her healing. This knowledge helped Tina to feel at peace within herself.
Working towards forgiveness and not blaming their parents for their mistakes was described by the women as an important aspect of healing, wellness and letting go of the past. As a result, they spoke about being able to gain an understanding of their parents’ experiences in Residential School and make sense of and empathize with their struggles as parents and human beings.

*Changing Family Patterns*

Each of the six women identified negative or unwanted patterns in their families. They shared how they wanted to give their children a different life than they had growing up. They spoke about how it was important to prevent patterns in their family from being perpetuated to the next generation. The storytellers’ described how they have been working towards creating new, healthy patterns in their families to make a different life for their children. Learning healthy parenting was significant to this process. A sub-theme within this section is identifying resilience.

Rose spoke about wanting to make changes within her family and working towards becoming involved in their Coast Salish culture. She strived to “embrace the culture, embrace the language, embrace our history, attend ceremonies… like where I feel like that’s where more of the healing comes from….” Rose further elaborated on how promoting this change involved challenging herself and her family members’ internalized racism:

So when I’m talking about where did my healing start, journey begin… like, I feel like formally it started with therapy, group therapy, individual therapy, challenging my, my abusers, challenging my belief… but also like once challenging my own stuff I feel like you know having that ripple effect and also challenging my family’s beliefs on, on our culture or on our history, instead of just you know ‘oh ya she just believes in um…’, even like patterns like “oh fuckin Indians all they do is drink on the streets” or something crazy
right, and just like wow where is that coming from? Like and just like challenging even my own family about their beliefs about our culture, our people, our history.

Rose spoke about how her close relationship with her mother now has enabled her to make a good life for her son and to parent in a healthy way. She shared how her mother is getting a post-secondary degree and they are healing and sharing together. Rose stated, “It’s almost like being able to reflect on it at home and identify patterns and do these things together... is all part of healing.” She and her mother are working together towards giving the next generation a better life and more healthy means to walk through life.

Ann described how her mother was completely selfless and never put her needs before those of others. She spoke about how she too has had much difficulty putting herself at the forefront and getting her needs met. Ann stated that she has to work hard on doing this today, but identifies that it is an intergenerational pattern that needs to be shifted. She shared:

And just, to just change those patterns of um... ya cuz she was so selfless to that, I think I, in some ways, I’ve always really admired her for that, that I... but never having that modeling of someone who put themself first... is something that I’m still, still working on.

And I think I there’s, I think there’s more layers on that...

Zoe identified the need to change unhealthy patterns within her family. She shared how the way she parents her children is fostering positive growth within them. Zoe described this shift in her children from what she experienced growing up:

...ya mainly when the kids say things to you that you know, you really want them to learn and you really hope for your kids to be a stronger person than you were as a child. And I can really hear in them that they have a lot more um, self-esteem than I did. And, and... they’re not afraid to ask for what they want. And I was always afraid to ask for what I really wanted. And, and they’re not. So you know, you must be doing something right...
and people always tell me how great my kids are and stuff like that... so... I think I must be doing something right!

Zoe also spoke about the importance she feels in wanting to give her children a healthy childhood. She described some of the ways in which she has made change for her children’s benefit:

But I know, I’ve learned... from this because now the people I choose in my life are healthier people and not ones that wanna hit me or go out drinking all night and smoking and smoke in the house and stuff like that. Cause my ex used to do that. And you know because my mom is such a good mother that you know, I came home because of her. She threatened to take my daughter from me. So I, I left someone that I cared about a lot for, for my children because I didn’t want to lose... I, I love my children to death and there’s nothing that I wouldn’t do for them. So, and I think I get that from my mom because my mom’s strong that way too.

I, I won’t go there again. I, I refuse to, to be like that. Like I just, really, really am careful about who I allow in my world and my life. You know, I, I know I’m very hard-nosed about that! Keeping my world safe for my kids! I don’t want my daughter to go through it worse than I did! Oh dear, that would just be hell to... like I think about my mom and she knew what I was living with and I just think about her... and my dad, he was close by and ya... those demons.

...but I really work hard towards my daughter having a better future. Um, there’s no drinking or drugging or smoking or anything like that allowed in my house, ever. I don’t drink or do drugs or nothing, my partner doesn’t. And when my children stay anywhere,
they only stay at my granny’s or my mom’s and they don’t drink when they have them.

So, you know I really, really, really, really trying for them to have a brighter future...

Eliza shared how the pattern of alcoholism within her family has been shifted greatly. She stated, “It’s been about twenty, twenty-five years since everybody’s sobered up and we are on a modern journey to wellness by taking alcohol out of our lives....” Eliza too stopped having alcohol in her life in her early twenties and worked towards parenting her children differently than she was raised. Eliza shared how she and her siblings have been working towards parenting their children in a good way, providing them with the nurturing they did not receive. Eliza talked about this shift:

You know, we became very committed parents as a result. We’ve turned our lives around and said this is enough. We wanted to stop.

And so, our children are different. Our children are really close; I have two sons. And I told them, I raised them to just love all your family. I never told them about the violence that I was raised with.

Eliza’s children are now young men and she is able today to see how they have grown up differently and have in fact been raised more positively than she was reared.

Flora spoke about the need she sees for changing patterns in her family and community. She described how being witness to these shifts is healing for her. Flora shared a story about a talk she had with an Elder who attended St. Michael’s with her mother:

Um, a memory... it was more of a conversation that again was with James and how we both were talking about the difference between the generations. We were talking about his son, John... um, who he raised um, he took a lot of care in raising John and John had so much more opportunities than James ever did and he raised John in a very different way than he raised his other children. James had been sober by the time, as you know and
it was just very different for him. So we were looking at how my life is so different than
my mother’s and positive in many ways, in terms of freedom and you know access to
resources and privilege. And then I look at Sarah’s (her daughter’s) life and the
differences are just so vast, you know and I think that’s, that’s healing definitely.

So, to me that’s probably the most significant aspect of my healing is being able to see it;
you know it’s very evident in the children and other people’s children. Like John and
James and his ability to relate to John on a very intimate level and a very truthful level
about his past. But still, it be healthy. And I want Sarah to be aware of, you know, what
my mother went through, but also place it within a larger context. You know being
thankful, but yet you know recognizing that the future is there; that’s important.

Tina spoke about how she sees healing as being witness to her daughter doing well and
succeeding, in addition to her achieving her own goals. Tina shared her thoughts on changes
within the generations of her family, including herself:

   The pride in my daughters’ achievements. Watching her grow up happy and helping her
   with her homework and her studies. To honor myself is the pride of actually getting
   through my education. I stuck it out for four years and I got through college. The last
   semester I completed with B’s, I was really surprised. And… I have my kids. And that I
   am trying as a parent to give them happy memories to give their children.

Identifying Resilience

   The identification of the resilience their parents had was described by the women as being
imperative to their shift in perceptions and in relationships. Identifying resilience rather than
deficits helped the storytellers’ to move forward and gain a greater understanding of their parents’
experiences and behaviors. This contributed to their ability to heal and let go of negative feelings about painful memories and experiences.

Rose spoke about how she began to identify her mother’s and grandmother’s resilience as she began to understand their internalized racism. This shift of perception into the positive contributed to her being able to move on with her healing work and make a more positive life for her son. Rose shared:

...we were talking about First Nations women and their resiliency that they had um throughout history. And it’s so huge because not until the Masters level and I’m a First Nations woman, did I even understand or comprehend the kind of resiliency that they had historically and not even in the undergrad did that get taught.

Ann talked quite a bit about how she was able to identify her mother’s resilience as an adult, rather than focus on how she was not successful as a parent. She shared some of her mother’s strengths:

...so there was, a lot of those positive attributes of my mother, really feeling loved and really feeling um like she, she was in our corner, like that was, like, that was really strong.

And... she was so selfless and anyone in community, like I bump into people regularly that, if I go up home, that just speak... with such... kind words about my mother and how selfless she was. Like she would just give and give and give and she had nothing for herself and um that’s really sad because... I think, I mean I think that, that’s, I think the root of that is the Residential School.

Tina described her mother’s incredible resilience and how she admires her so much for her strength and will. Tina shared, “But she was so strong. She was such a strong woman.” Her mother’s strength to live through ten years of violence and abuse in Residential School is
something she recognizes today as being an enormous testimony to her strength. Tina is inspired by her mother and how she was able to cope with a hard life as best she could.

The women identified the theme of changing family patterns as being important to them for their own healing and for their children. They described wanting to ensure that their children had different experiences than they did, ensuring that they are safe and connected to their family and culture. The process of identifying their parents’ resilience, rather than their downfalls, was also described as being important to their shifts towards wellness. A deep sense of admiration replaced negative feelings and perceptions about their parents.

Being Helpers in the Indigenous Community

The storytellers’ are currently helpers or are striving to become helpers in their First Nations communities. The women spoke about helping themselves, so that they could help others work through the aftermath of colonization and become well. This role as a helper is an important one in the community, but it is also healing for those that walk in this way. The women’s personal experiences and healing work adds meaning and depth to the work they do, making it more than just a job. For the storytellers’, being a helper is a part of life and living, not just something that they do to earn money. It is their role in the community to be of service to others and to role model living life in a good way.

Rose is working towards her Masters’ degree to further her ability and skills in being a helper in her community. Her interest is in being a helper amongst her people and promoting healing and wellness. Rose is a captivating speaker and an inspiring role model to those she interacts with in practice. She is a strong and courageous young woman.
Ann is also currently working on a Masters’ degree. Ann talked about her work in the community as a helper and how this process of giving back contributes to her healing. Ann spoke about this need she feels to help others who are suffering:

I know that the work that I want to do in the community is kinda connected with a lot of our sorrow and I’ve been wanting to help our community... overcome, overcome that shame.

Ann shared, “it’s not just a paid job... it’s just what I want to be doing is just work with our communities to return to the values and beliefs that make us more connected with one another....” Additionally, she said that she is a helper because she wants to be a part of the solutions to healing. Her Indigenous identity strongly informs this work and her ability to work towards healing.

Zoe has completed health support work training and currently works in prevention services. She spoke about how her work in the community has been healing and inspiring for her. Zoe described this process:

And ah working at my workplace, we have so many you know, wonderful staff that have come there and... the people that I work for... like all those things really contributed to getting better. I know I have a long ways to go, but I know a lot of that I’m really fortunate...

Zoe is very proud of her accomplishments and the work that she does in health promotion. She plans to return to post-secondary education one day to further her learning in health care.

Eliza works as helper in her community, ensuring families and community members have a connection to their culture and community. Eliza has a Bachelors’ degree and has been working in a helping capacity for many years. She shared about her role as a helper in the community:
So I see my job as helping us be that one people again and I might not see that time in my lifetime, but my faith is that. So what are you going to do? Faith allows us to ask good questions of ourselves.

So there’s a belief set right, there’s a guiding principle and a good question to ask yourself is, how do you integrate that into your life? Well what I seen my grandmother do, she lived it. For some reason I could see it. And for some reason it was given to me in my head to follow that. It saved me and I couldn’t tell you how it saved me, but I lived kind of a harrowing young life. But I always came back to that, you know and used it the last fifteen years of my job. And people would say, what are you doing? And I go, I don’t know. But I was just doing what I was taught. And I didn’t even try to name it.

So in my job in the last fifteen years, I’m listening to stories over and over, many different stories. I had my tears. It’s a way, it’s just a process of letting go, not keeping it. You know part of me needs to cry; it’s sad, people have been hurt.

The teachings Eliza received from her grandmother have given her the tools and the inspiration to be a helper in her community. She holds that knowledge in her heart in order to carry out her work and lives it in everyday life as well.

Flora is also a helper in her community, supporting health and healing among Indigenous families. Flora spoke about the importance of recognizing and being witness to change in her community, as this is what enables her to continue this work. Flora has a Bachelors’ degree and plans to gain a Masters’ degree in the near future.

Tina completed a four year program in college and has plans to enter into a Bachelors’ degree program. Her goal is to support and help other Indigenous people that are struggling with
their healing and wellness. In the meantime, she does so behind the scenes in an administration position in a First Nations organization and continues to work on her own healing.

The final theme, being a helper in their communities, was identified by all six storytellers' as an aspect of their healing and striving towards wellness. They described wanting to give back to their communities and their ability to be a resource and support to others. This role of being a helper was spoken about as being deeply meaningful for the women and a part of their process of healing.

This chapter provides a description of the effects the six women attribute to being daughters of Residential School survivors. These include experiencing disconnection from identity, parenting difficulties, the pervasiveness of silence, experiences of racism, and compromised mental wellness. Furthermore, the women shared stories about their processes for healing from these effects. Their steps taken towards healing included gaining a post-secondary education, learning about and connecting with their Indigenous identity, attending therapy and healing programs, working towards forgiveness and understanding of their parents' experiences in Residential School, and being helper in the community. These healing steps have contributed to the six storytellers' gaining wellness and positive self-identities. As a result, they have been able to shift intergenerational patterns within their families and create more positive experiences for their children.

**Summary**

This chapter describes the storytellers' parents' experiences in Residential School and how they were impacted by this legacy. I recount the stories in the words of the women I interviewed and honor their courage to heal and share. The intergenerational impacts the women described include disconnection from Indigenous identity and heritage, parenting difficulties, living in
silence, experiences of racism, and compromised mental wellness. I also illustrate the steps that the storytellers’ took towards healing, which included gaining post-secondary education, learning about and connecting with Indigenous identity, attending therapy and healing programs, working towards forgiveness and understanding their parents’ experience in Residential School, changing family patterns, and being helpers in their communities. In the next chapter, I provide a discussion of the women’s stories, using the teachings and framework of the Anishnabe Medicine Wheel. Further to this, I relate the findings to the literature reviewed on healing and decolonization.
Chapter 6: Discussion of Stories

Introduction

In the previous chapter, the life stories of the women were presented in their own words. This chapter includes a discussion of the women's healing stories in terms of Anishnabe teachings on the Medicine Wheel. I relate the findings of this study to the literature reviewed on healing and decolonization and assert that healing processes have many layers that take time to unfold. Furthermore, I argue that healing is a consciousness-raising experience that includes learning about and connecting with one's culture and other Indigenous people (Aboriginal Corrections Policy Unit, 2002; Sterling, 2002; Ing, 2000; Anderson, 2000; Tuhiwai Smith, 2004; Hingley, 2000). I also review the research questions posed and describe the storytellers' steps taken towards healing and wellness and the importance of carrying out their roles as helpers in community as a part of the healing process and identity formation.

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that healing for the storytellers' in this project has multiple layers. These layers are complex and cannot be examined adequately through Westernized theory or an individualistic psychological standpoint. They do not have a linear order and vary vastly. Without a conceptualization of the history that Indigenous people have survived from a First Nations perspective, it is difficult to truly gain an understanding of their experiences. Healing for First Nations people is a process that takes time to unfold. In addition, a healing journey lasts a lifetime. When looking at wellness from a First Nations point of view, one must do this in a holistic way. The self has four parts, mental, physical, emotional and spiritual.
Each part comes together to make a whole. When all parts are not present, the self becomes off balance and this makes functioning and growth difficult to achieve.

I present this section using the teachings of the Anishnabe (Ojibway) Medicine Wheel. By using the teachings I have received on the Medicine Wheel, I have been able to make meaning of the women's steps towards healing. Therefore, this discussion is presented using these Medicine Wheel teachings. It has been difficult to separate the aspects of healing and wellness into categories because they are all linked and related. Therefore, it is useful to frame the steps taken towards healing within the Medicine Wheel, as in this way all is connected, nothing is separate and the person is viewed as a whole. In addition, healing from a First Nations perspective is not a linear process that has a beginning and an end. There are various teachings of the Medicine Wheel; this is one way of interpreting them and the way I have come to know and understand (see Appendix 3).

The teachings of the Medicine Wheel begin in the Eastern Doorway (also called a Direction). This is the place of new beginnings, where new life starts, and it includes the mental component of self. The Eastern Doorway is the place of Grandfather Buffalo, who sustains life, and it is also the place of vision. In this direction we think about where we need to go, what we need to learn, and express gratitude for the gifts that are received in this doorway. We use the color red in this direction which is symbolic of spring.

For the Indigenous women in this study, healing consisted of gaining an in-depth understanding of the historical context of colonization in their post-secondary education. They related this legacy of oppression to themselves, their families and communities. In effect, they underwent a consciousness-raising experience, as their world views shifted dramatically. They began to see their world through an Indigenous lens, rather than through a Westernized epistemology, upon learning and connecting with their heritage and history. For the storytellers', this process was empowering and enhanced their sense of recognizing their people’s strength and
resilience contemporarily and historically. Hingley (2000) speaks to this process of consciousness-raising as a profound change in one’s reality and view of the world. Hingley suggests that this can be achieved by working towards overcoming an internalized colonial mindset. Henderson (2000) suggests that achieving this process of decolonization includes deconstructing Westernized epistemologies and adopting an Indigenous worldview. This process begins at the individual level and transforms into community change and mobilization (Hingley, 2000). A change in consciousness became possible for the women in this study upon learning and understanding the legacy of colonialism and deconstructing their feelings of internalized racism. The Aboriginal Corrections Policy Unit (2002) and Ing (2000) emphasize the need to learn about what occurred historically as a piece of the healing process.

The women made connections to their culture and communities and were able to embrace and have pride in their Indigenous identities. An outcome of these factors included being able to connect with and begin to take care of the self, thereby gaining a sense of self-efficacy. The Aboriginal Corrections Policy Unit (2002) and Ing (2000) stress the importance of healing through culture and ceremonies. This involves learning teachings and making connections with leaders, spiritual helpers, Elders and other community members that role model wellness. Sterling (2002) makes this same assertion and further suggests that in this way, the whole self can emerge.

The Eastern Doorway is the place of new beginnings and learning. I relate this belief to the new life that was breathed into these women, upon learning about the devastating history their people endured through colonization. This mental and emotional process of learning the historical context as adults appears to have been integral to allowing the storytellers’ healing to begin to unfold. They were able to start to piece together their childhoods and gain some understanding of the suffering that their parents’ endured in Residential School. This process ignited the need to re-conceptualize and deconstruct their entire world views and to start to work
towards redefining their epistemologies, also referred to as decolonization. This then paved the way to begin to learn about and embrace their culture and identity. Healing then swiftly began to move forward for the women.

The Southern Doorway contains the physical aspect of self and Grandfather Sun. This Grandfather sustains life by providing the nourishment for growth and change. This is the place of time and relationships, which guide us into the next direction. In this direction we have the color yellow, which represents gratitude. The season represented in this doorway is summer, the time for harvesting and preparing for winter.

The six women strongly identified the need for changing unwanted family patterns in their families and making positive changes for their children. It was important to them that the next generation and generations to come could have a different reality than they experienced growing up. The steps that they identified as working toward this goal included learning how to parent in a healthy way and maintaining healthy relationships. Sterling (2002) and Ing (2000) identified the need for Indigenous people to learn how to practice healthy parenting in their studies. They assert that this is a large contributing factor to healing families and communities from the impacts of colonization and undoing cycles of abuse and neglect. Anderson (2000) further suggests the need to raise the young men and girls to be proud of the Indigenous identities, histories and heritage. She speaks about the need to raise children to be healthy adults and to instill the need for them to be positive role models to others in the community. This includes relying on community and familial support to raise the children together (Anderson, 2000).

The storytellers' also spoke to the importance of identifying resilience amongst their family members. They were then able to see positive attributes, recognizing that some unhealthy behaviors may have been coping mechanisms that required much strength and honor. Seeing the good rather than the negative was empowering for the women and was helpful for them to move forward on their journeys and to build new relationships with their family members.
Aboriginal People, Resilience and the Residential School Legacy (2003), defines resiliency as the “capacity to spring back from adversity and have a good life outcome despite emotional, mental or physical distress” (p. iii). This report identifies protective factors that promote resiliency and decrease risk factors, such as suicide, substance abuse, violence, etc. Protective factors may include education, positive family interactions, employment and self-esteem (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2003). The storytellers’ spoke about striving to obtain more protective factors within their lives for the benefit of their children. They sought to decrease the risk factors involved. Additionally, they described identifying their parents’ resilience. They discovered how, in the aftermath of adversity and trauma, the Residential School survivors in their family were able to “spring back” and go on to live as best they could. The women spoke about the admiration and respect they developed for their parents’ (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2003). As a result, many of the women described forming new relationships with their parents’.

The Southern Doorway is the place of time and relationships. As one journeys in this direction, it is a time for immense growth. This growth is difficult to achieve without the proper attention and nourishment. One can then have the strength to begin to heal relationships and accept the positive and negative. When journeying in this doorway, one learns to take care of the self and of others. The women in this study were able to redefine their relationships with family members. In time, these relationships began to be mended. New relationships based on new insights emerged with family and with the self.

The Western Doorway is said to be the hardest to walk through. This is where Grandfather Thunderbird sits, who brings us the gift of water. This is the direction of the emotional part of self and it is the place of feelings and reason. It is here, within this doorway, that we are forced to look within, to gain greater introspection into the self. This Doorway contains the color dark blue and represents the fall season.
The six storytellers identified the positive influence that going through therapy has had on their healing. This process enabled the women to begin to gain a greater understanding of themselves and work through their past traumas. In addition, they described the significance of being able to share their life stories and the importance of writing in supporting this work. The storytellers also spoke about how this process helped them to be able to achieve a sense of forgiveness and understanding towards those that had caused them harm and/or hurt in the past. Achieving forgiveness was identified as being very important to the women, as they no longer wished to lay blame. The Aboriginal Corrections and Policy Unit report (2002) describes the relevance of different kinds of therapies and healing programs as being vital to healing and wellness for Indigenous people. The report suggests using multiple types of therapies that are both mainstream and alternative. This same report also speaks of the significance of forgiveness as an important element of healing. This is said to be crucial, as obtaining forgiveness allows one to let go of negative feelings and past hurts. This can enable the healer to move forward from their pain and suffering (Aboriginal Corrections and Policy Unit, 2002). Sterling’s study (2002) also emphasizes the need for forgiveness and suggests the need for grieving ceremonies as well. The women in this study identified their need to forgive in order to let go of the pain they carried. This process of forgiveness took a great deal of inner strength, introspection and insight. As they began to look within themselves, they could then offer unconditional love and acceptance to their family members.

In the Western Doorway, one begins to look deeply within the self. This direction teaches about feelings and reason, and it is here that emotional maturity comes into fruition. One becomes comfortable with the self and then new connections with the outside world can be made on a meaningful level. A meaningful identity begins to emerge and insight into the spiritual is often able to be embraced. The women’s stories about their healing processes relate to this concept of looking within the self. They were able to make an internal connection, in addition to further
developing a new relationship with their people and their families based on mutual respect and understanding. These processes were deeply meaningful for the women and contributed greatly to their ability for share their stories and work through their pain. As a result they were able to forgive those that had hurt them in their pasts.

The Northern Doorway contains the spiritual aspect of self and is the direction where our Elders sit. This is the place of movement and change and Grandfather Wind sits in this Doorway. When one passes through this Doorway, deep insight into the world of the spiritual is gained. This Doorway completes the cycle of life and leads us back into the Eastern Doorway. This Doorway contains the color white and represents the winter season.

The storytellers' spoke about the emergence of their Indigenous identities and how coming to know and understand the self in relation to their culture paved the way of their healing. As a result of this individual change and growth, the women identified taking what they had learned about themselves and their culture back to their community in order to help others take similar steps towards healing. This process of giving back was talked about as being a part of their spiritual journey and described as meaningful for them, as being helpers, it is a part of their healing. The Aboriginal Corrections and Policy Unit report (2002) describes Stage Four of healing as encompassing a desire to serve one’s community, moving forward to become a role model and helper. Anderson (2000) and Ing (2000) also speak to the importance of giving back to one’s Indigenous community as a part of the healing process. Anderson describes this reciprocal exchange of helping as integral to gaining a sense of purpose within one’s community. Gaining purpose then paves the way for a strong sense of self-efficacy, which enhances the ability to able to make other changes, such as women reclaiming their political authority in communities (Anderson, 2000). The emergence of the six storytellers’ whole selves that encompassed a sense of Indigenous pride and identity helped them to become helpers in their communities.

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The women also spoke about the importance of having spirituality in their day to day living. Being connected spiritually involved such things as prayer and ceremony. Sterling’s dissertation (2002) speaks to the healing of multigenerational trauma as needing to encompass spirituality and a connection to the ancestors (those in the Spirit World). The participants’ in this study spoke about spirituality encompassing prayer, having gratitude, sharing, attending ceremony and understanding the self. They emphasized this spiritual aspect of healing as balancing the self, as it is one of the four aspects of wellness (Sterling, 2002). The Aboriginal Corrections and Policy Unit report (2002) reiterates the value of spirituality in everyday life as being integral to healing and wellness as well. Furthermore, their spiritual connection to all that is living and in the spirit world developed and is a source of maintaining balance and wellness.

The Northern Doorway is the place where significant change and spiritual growth occurs. Wisdom and insight into the self and the spiritual are its focus, and it is a great place of learning. This direction also completes a journey and another begins. For the women, their identities came full circle and a whole self emerged. All the pieces came together to form strong Indigenous women that continue their journeys through being helpers in their communities. They also began having a greater connection to their spirituality. The women’s healing continues and they journey through the Medicine Wheel again and again. Ann described healing as “peeling the layers”; traveling in the four directions is a similar analogy that helps in defining and guiding the self.

The findings in this study are similarly related to what is found throughout various parts of the literature, both on the effects of Residential Schools and on Indigenous healing and wellness. These stories begin to fill in the gaps in the literature and add meaning to the healing and decolonization literature. The voices of these six women enhance what is written and also validate the information reviewed about healing and wellness. I found that the literature suggests that healing and wellness have many layers and must be viewed from a holistic perspective (Aboriginal Corrections Policy Unit 2002; Anderson, 2000). The literature asserts that healing
comes from learning about and living life based on cultural values and beliefs. In addition, it states that working towards wellness and embracing ceremonies and language are integral to meaningful change. Learning how to parent, changing negative patterns and seeking out role models within the Indigenous community are also discussed as being relevant to healing processes (Aboriginal Corrections Policy Unit, 2002; Sterling, 2002; Ing, 2000). Healing is conceptualized in the literature as encompassing connecting to the land, resisting mainstream worldviews and replacing these epistemologies with those of one’s Indigenous heritage (Sterling, 2002; Anderson; 2000; Hingley, 2000; Henderson, 2000). Lastly, wellness also involves giving back to communities and being a part of the solutions (Aboriginal Corrections Policy Unit, 2002; Anderson, 2000; Ing, 2000).

The women interviewed identified many of the healing principles discussed in the literature, except gaining a connection to the land. I do not doubt that this is of importance to them, but it was not apparent in their stories. The results in this study emphasize two important themes related to healing: the importance of learning the historical context of Indigenous people’s experiences of colonization and the value of therapy. It appears that the literature pertaining to the development of a First Nations identity is missing important pieces of the puzzle if little value is placed on these aspects of healing. It is important to be explicit that currently, post-secondary education and therapy take place in Eurocentric Western-dominated institutional realms. They do not often address the needs of Indigenous people holistically and culturally, and often do not take into account the historical context of colonialism. Therefore, these two aspects of healing cannot meet the needs of Indigenous peoples healing processes independently. This may be part of the reason these two aspects of healing are not emphasized in the literature. I argue that education and therapy are parts of a whole process and that they have value in the healing process. My personal experiences with healing and wellness mirror and validate the findings in this study, as my process has also included the six healing themes identified.
I found the literature reviewed to be somewhat prescriptive and linear at times. For example, the Aboriginal Corrections and Policy Unit report (2002) identifies healing as encompassing a four-stage linear process. I think the analogy of “peeling layers” is a much more accurate way of describing the healing process. In reality, one’s journey involves small pieces of a big puzzle being fitted together, which takes time and patience. There is no one formula for healing, but there are some useful tools that Indigenous people have drawn on. Many people, such as the storytellers’ in this study, have shared what has been helpful for their healing. Lastly, I found that the literature lacks a cohesive whole. Although the literature has commonalities, I found it to be scattered and inconsistent. I did not find contradictions within the healing literature.

To review, the research questions formulated in this study were: What are the strategies that daughters of Indian Residential School survivors use to move towards healing from the intergenerational effects of the Schools? To what extent is reclaiming women’s traditional Indigenous roles related to the healing process? The results of this research indicate that the steps towards healing include gaining post secondary education and learning the history of colonization, learning about and connecting with one’s Indigenous identity, engaging in therapy and healing programs, working towards forgiveness and gaining an understanding of their parents’ experiences in Residential School, changing unwanted family patterns, and being helpers in the Indigenous community. These factors all contributed to the formation of the storytellers’ strong and healthy Indigenous identities and world views.

The second research question posed enquires about the significance of women’s roles within their communities. Indigenous women’s roles traditionally included raising children (Tohe, 2000), taking care of the home or lodge (Castellano, 1989), being powerful ceremonial leaders (Hungry Wolf, 1980; St. Pierre and Long Soldier, 1995), and being clan leaders and respected decision-makers (Castellano, 1989). As discussed previously, Indigenous women’s
roles were systematically undermined through the colonization process, particularly through Residential Schools (Fiske, 1996).

As cultures evolve and change, so do roles within communities. A role such as mothering and taking care of the home may not change so much, although the context within which one has to carry it out may be altered. The influence of colonization on Indigenous communities has distorted First Nations people’s ideologies about the worth and importance of women in our communities. Anderson (2000) argues that Indigenous women today must re-assert their powerful roles as mothers, helpers and leaders in their communities. She describes how this process will restore balance in communities and will facilitate healing and wellness (2000).

The six women’s stories described them carrying out the roles of mothers and working as helpers in their communities. The need for Indigenous helpers is abundant, as there is much suffering from the legacy of colonialism that still needs to be healed. Indigenous people continue to assert that this work needs to be done by our people, for our people. Therefore, the women’s roles as helpers are very important and are a great contribution to community healing. It is difficult to measure the extent to which the reclaiming of their roles in the community as helpers is related to their healing processes. I believe it is safe to say that this is quite significant to them because this role is a large part of their identities. Coming to know and understand our roles in community contributes greatly to having a sense of purpose and meaning in our lives. For me, the process of learning about and claiming my traditional role as a helper in my community has been a valuable part of the formation of my identity and my healing. I validate the six women’s assertion of the importance of giving back to the community and being role models to others while supporting their healing journeys. It creates a deep sense of meaning in our lives and completes the circle, while we enter into another cycle.

The results of this study begin to fill in the gaps that have been identified in the literature about First Nations healing and decolonization. The stories of the women interviewed in this
study add meaning and depth to the literature, along with validating and enhancing what exists. This addition to the literature strengthens and reiterates the need for support in Indigenous communities that assists with overcoming challenges that First Nations people deal with on a daily basis. This report also emphasizes the need for spaces to be created for healing stories to be told, as it was emphasized that the telling of one’s story is healing in itself.

Summary

This chapter is a discussion of the results of this study in relation to Anishnabe Medicine Wheel teachings. I relate the storytellers’ steps taken towards healing to the literature reviewed on healing and decolonization. I make the assertion that healing is a process that involves peeling away layers of hurt and sadness and transforming their experiences into a positive light. This process includes identifying resilience and giving back to the community by helping others to heal. I also illustrate the results in relation to the two research questions posed. In the next chapter I turn to discuss the limitations and validity of this study. I conclude this manuscript with closing thoughts on the steps the six storytellers’ took towards healing and becoming well.
Chapter 7: Completing the Circle

Introduction

The previous chapter provides a discussion of the storytellers’ experiences of working towards healing within the framework and teachings of the Anishnabe Medicine Wheel. This chapter illustrates the limitations of this study and the validity issues considered. Such issues include my influence on the research and interpretation (Maxwell, 1996). I argue that my personal influence as an Indigenous woman who is a daughter of a Residential School survivor enhanced the outcomes of this research, rather than making it biased (Maxwell, 1996). I provide a discussion of the implications of this research for social work education and practice, social policy reform and the existing literature on Indigenous healing and wellness. Furthermore, I make conclusions about healing and wellness in relation to the stories shared. I assert that healing is a process of peeling away layers that lasts a lifetime. Finally, I conclude with thoughts on healing and wellness in the words of the storytellers’, honoring their strength, resilience, and courage to heal.

Limitations and Validity

One significant limitation of this study is that only six Indigenous women’s stories have been explored. Therefore, only internal generalizations can be made. The purpose of this research was not to make broad generalizations; it was to validate and document healing stories. Therefore, this consideration is not a serious issue. Other issues that may limit the worthiness of this study are my interpretation, bias and reactivity. My Indigenous epistemology has heavily influenced this study coming full circle. I have tried to reduce the negative outcomes of this by
being reflexive throughout the process, and by recording my thoughts and process in memos. Using a Qualitative Description method and an Oral History methodology helped to decrease these negative outcomes as the purpose was to tell women’s stories, not to come to specific and generalized conclusions. I believe my influence on the research has positive outcomes as well. Such outcomes include the process being meaningful for both myself and the participants’, the fact that the research was conducted in a culturally appropriate and relevant fashion, and the greater understanding and insight I gained into the storytellers’ healing processes. The women might not have opened up in the same way if the researcher had been a non-First Nations person, and the same insights might not have been captured.

Another validity issue worthy of discussion is how the sample was obtained. The advertisement for participants was emailed out to Indigenous people. Therefore, only those with access to email would have been reached. Generally speaking, those who have access to education also have access to technology such as email. It is important to note that post-secondary educated Indigenous people are not the only people who are on a healing journey. Many people who have little mainstream education have also done much healing work and live in a good way. There are also many forms of knowledge such as traditional knowledge that are equally valuable and important in my view. In addition, due to the profound poverty that is abundant in First Nations communities, there are many people who do not have access to education or resources such as therapy. The ability to access higher education and therapy entails having privilege, in addition to incredible resilience and strength. The women in this sample are extraordinary and their accomplishments are not only an inspiration, but they are a resource and a testament to our people’s ability to overcome adversity and make great strides towards wellness.

I considered many other validity issues throughout the duration of this research study. I considered the following validity threats and strategies used to decrease the threats: description; interpretation; theory; triangulation; and member checks. Description refers to the imprecision of
the data. Description was reduced in this study as the interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim (Maxwell, 1996). Interpretation was a very important factor to be considered in this study during the analysis process. Interpretation occurs when the researcher makes assumptions about the meanings in the data, based on her own history, experiences or beliefs. It was important during analysis that I searched for the meanings that the participants made of their experiences, not my own. This issue was reduced by ensuring that I listened actively and avoided asking leading questions. Using the Descriptive Research and Oral History methodologies with loosely structured interviews helped with this issue, as the participants were free to tell their stories in any fashion that they desired (Maxwell, 1996; Sandelowski, 2000; Cruikshank, 1994). The theory aspect refers to searching for literature that is discrepant to the data and looking at alternative plausible explanations to the research findings. I was not able to find any literature that does not validate my assumptions and what I have found in the course of my research. I re-reviewed the literature after the analysis was completed to find possible alternative healing processes for First Nations people, but I was not successful in finding any new information (Maxwell, 1996). Triangulation refers to obtaining information about the phenomenon being studied from various sources. In this study I collected information from three sources; the participants, the literature and from my personal story of healing. Using three sources of information has increased my ability to make generalizations (Maxwell, 1996). Member checks refer to eliciting feedback from the participants of the study. As previously discussed, this was a major part of my research design. Draft copies of the manuscript were distributed to the women for their review to satisfy this requirement. Doing member checks contributed immensely to reducing validity issues relating to interpretation, bias and reactivity. This also ensured accountability to the participants and respect for their stories (Maxwell, 1996).

If I were to conduct this study over again, I would also have interviewed six men and examined both First Nations men’s and women’s experiences of healing. I would also have
utilized the Narrative Approach to research in the analysis of the stories. This would have enabled the stories to be presented as whole stories, rather than separated into categories. Overall, I feel the design of the study was completed in a culturally respectful and relevant way that reflected the needs of the participants.

Implications of Research

This research is valuable as it provides a contribution to the existing literature on Indigenous healing. It validates what currently exists and also adds to current conceptualizations about healing and wellness. The findings can be applied to First Nations healing programs and services, in assisting with their development and evolution. In addition, the results can inform helping professionals' practice with Indigenous women as this manuscript can be used as a resource for social service professionals, for personal and professional development. Indigenous social workers who have been impacted by Residential Schools need to take extra care of themselves when working with the intergenerational effects. It is my hope that the results could support social workers ongoing healing, alongside of supporting the development of practice as it contains tools that can be utilized for healing and wellness. Furthermore, helpers may also gain a greater understanding of how Indigenous women view healing and how to support this process, particularly within the context of colonialism. Indigenous and non-Indigenous helpers may be able to better form holistic healing plans with people, work with the whole person and meet their needs more inclusively as a result of the contents of this manuscript. This research suggests the need for Indigenous people to have increased access to therapy and healing programs that are culturally relevant and appropriate.

The results could also serve to change public school curriculum to include an accurate portrayal of the history of colonization that First Nations people have endured for the past five hundred years. If Indigenous children and non-Indigenous children receive a more accurate
conceptualization of the historical context in which this country was born, then this may serve to reduce the seriousness of identity loss and reduce racist perceptions and viewpoints. In addition, they may also gain increased protective factors to reduce risk factors. As a result, First Nations children may be less apt to experience internalized racism and would have a more positive understanding of their families and communities. They may also go on to gain post-secondary education and become leaders and helpers in their Indigenous communities. The healing cycle will thereby continue to be perpetuated and strengthened.

Additionally, the results of this research suggest that there are further implications for social work education. The women stressed the significance that learning the history of colonization had on sparking their healing journeys. Therefore, I believe this suggests the increased need for social work education and curriculum to include more information relating to the historical context of Indigenous people and how to work within this context with families and individuals. I also recommend that social work education teach students how to work with the whole person, rather than just solving the problem at hand. Working from this perspective makes practice more holistic and positive and prevents increased risks. Furthermore, this education can also be useful for non-Indigenous students as they are more likely to have a greater understanding of the current context of First Nations people and how best to meet the needs of those accessing services. As a result, social work students would be equipped with greater abilities to work with Indigenous people in a more informed manner. This change in social work education could also be a means by which to advocate for change in social policy. Policy could be reformed to better meet the needs of First Nations people accessing social services. Such reform could include making greater access to post-secondary education possible for Indigenous students. In addition to this, policy could be created to ensure funding for education is available for all First Nations people, as many are not eligible due to funding cuts and not having Indian Status.
I also discovered that research was scarce on the topic of internalized racism. The results suggest that overcoming a sense of internalized racism was integral to the participants’ ability to accept and explore their Indigenous identities. Therefore, I have come to see that this is another area needing further exploration, along with inquiry into how people overcome the internalization. Furthermore, I feel that research needs to be conducted further on how traditional Indigenous roles fit within contemporary society. Many First Nations people assert that we need to reclaim tradition and I would like to see a researcher build upon this manuscript by exploring this topic of community roles. I also see a need for further research into how traditional roles in communities can be integrated into the contemporary context. Many people speak of the need to revitalize tradition, although there is little written on how we can work towards carrying that out today. I see this revitalization as an important part of decolonization and the self-determination process, but I also see that things cannot be as they were prior to contact given the capitalist society that we live in. There is a place for revitalized tradition though, but I am left wondering what that would look like. Where is this revitalization already taking place?

This study also suggests that more research is needed on the topic of intergenerational transmission of Residential School effects and on healing from these effects. This research must include the voices of Indigenous people and create a space for them to tell their stories. Furthermore, a study of a similar nature should be conducted with First Nations men as they need to be able to speak to the same issues of healing and wellness.

Conclusions

This study of six Indigenous women has both validated and added to the existing literature on healing and wellness. The findings characterize healing as having multiple layers that unfold the development of a First Nations identity. These layers include learning about and connecting with one’s Indigenous identity and heritage, forgiveness and understanding, working towards
personal and familial change, accessing therapy and healing programs, and giving back to the community through helping others to heal. It is apparent that healing is a process that must be viewed from a holistic perspective. Interpretation through an Indigenous lens assists in viewing healing as striving towards wellness and balance, rather than from a deficit or problem-focused approach. The conceptualization of First Nations healing builds upon and moves beyond Western ideas about individual change and healing, and forces us to look outside an individualistic viewpoint. As the storytellers' shared, healing is much more than simply personal growth and change; it is a part of community healing. Their courage to heal and tell their stories will have a lasting impact on readers of this study and on the people they touch as helpers. This influence will be felt in their communities as they role model wellness, strength and resilience to other young women, the same way their role models guided and supported them. This giving back completes cycles of healing, and greatly and meaningfully contributes to the community movement towards healing and wellness.

I wish to complete this circle with some of the women’s closing thoughts on healing and wellness. Rose shared about her process in therapy and how she began to view herself and her family in a positive light:

And I think for me um... like with my family and the healing is that now like having kind of... not that I’m finished my healing or you know anything like that, I think it’s a life long journey. But I feel like in the family now that I’ve kind of looked at that part of my life and really faced it and stood up to it... I feel like I have respect for my family and that they turn to me in their time of need because I know that road or I’ve been down that road.

Or I just feel like I have more respect um from having done that even though it was hard.

Ann shared her thoughts on the resilience and incredible strength of Indigenous people's will to move forward in the aftermath of cultural devastation and adversity:
I think if the government didn’t mess things up so much that, like I think it’s worth the pain because they just pissed us off so much that we’re stronger than we ever would have been than if they were nice to us (laughter)! You know what I mean? Like they just gave us so much reason to not give up!

Zoe shared her thoughts on community healing:

Just that we need to, we need to as a people and a nation, grow and learn from this bad experience. I guess that’s what I get from, when I talk about my dad’s experience and all our purposes and our role. And hopefully more people could find healing ways that work for them. You know what I’ve talked about here might not work for my next door neighbor, you, or you know, maybe one or two of the things I’ve talked about might help somebody. Always, we can all help each other, that’s what I think! Cause we need it, we need the help! As workers, as community members, as whoever you are, in the, in this, this community which you are writing about. I think we need each other so much, even the non-First Nations they help. We need to be accepting of the helpers because they want to help us and that’s a good place for everyone to be, who were.... because we actually all come from one, right? I believe in that, we all come from one and I don’t... and I think there’s good and bad in every relationship and that um we need to look at more of the good people that are willing to be here to help. And that’s about it!

Eliza spoke about the power that she sees traditional ceremonies as having in terms of healing people:

…but I know that I have been home a lot of times to potlatches and I can see those people coming alive in those potlatches. I’m a people watcher and you look at some of those people and you know what they’ve been through. And you can see part of them that are just living and that watching them dance, watching those kids sing our songs in our
language. You can see a bit of them light up. When you can harness that is something, you know, valid.

Flora spoke to the importance of making sure that the experiences and stories of Residential School survivors continue to be shared and are not forgotten:

...I think it’s healing, not just for me to hear similar stories, but I think it’s, I also get the sense that it’s healing for, you know the people that I’ve talked to... that there’s still survivors and that their children are around and I just get that sense that it’s really a positive thing for them, that you know, we haven’t forgotten. I think that’s the main gist I get from it is that, I think that would be the worst case scenario for everyone involved, especially the survivors... that people forget... what they went through and stuff.

Tina in her final words spoke about the need she feels to get justice for the suffering that her mother endured while in Residential School. Tina shared that:

Something I’ve always thought in the back of my mind that I would do is to try to get some justice for her, to free her spirit and mine and my seven generations to come.

Summary

This chapter provides a conclusion to this manuscript. A discussion of the limitations and validity concerns is provided, describing how these issues were minimized through reflexivity, verification and balancing loyalties (Maxwell, 1996). Furthermore, I describe how my personal Indigenous epistemology has enhanced this research and my understanding of the women’s stories, making the process meaningful for the storytellers’, for the community and for myself. I conclude that healing has multiple layers that can include gaining post-secondary education, learning about and connecting with one’s Indigenous identity, attending therapy and healing programs, working towards forgiveness and understanding the survivors’ experience in
Residential School, changing family patterns, and being a helper in the community. Finally, I complete the circle of this study by illustrating closing thoughts on healing and wellness as shared by the six storytellers', acknowledging their wisdom and expertise on healing.
References


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Appendix 1: Interview Questions

Daughters of Indian Residential School Survivors: Healing Stories

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself. Where are you from?

2. Tell me about a significant memory from your childhood.

3. Tell me about some events or stories that describe the effect of having been raised by a Residential School survivor?

4. What do you know about your parents’ experiences at the Residential School(s)?

5. When did healing start for you?

6. What events or stories can you tell me about that describe the steps you have taken to heal?

7. Tell me about a significant memory in your adulthood.
Your signature indicates that you understand that your information will be shared with the investigator(s) stated above and a professional will be hired to transcribe the interview tapes.

Your signature also indicates that you understand the investigators duty to report any disclosure harm to a child to the appropriate authority.

Participant Signature ____________________________ Date __________

Printed Name of the participant signing above
Appendix 3: Anishnabe Medicine Wheel

Anishnabe (Ojibway) Medicine Wheel

- Emotional
  - Western Doorway
    - Feelings & Reason
  - Northern Doorway
    - Movement & Change

- Physical
  - Southern Doorway
    - Time & Relationships
  - Eastern Doorway
    - Vision & New Beginnings

- Spiritual
  - Mental