Marching Toward Change: Indigenous Youth Perspectives on the Missing and Murdered

Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) Crisis

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Education

in

School and Clinical Child Psychology

Department of Educational Psychology

University of Alberta

Abstract

In response to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) crisis in Canada, annual Marches are held to raise awareness, increase community healing, and prevent further gendered violence. Blending a Western focus group and Indigenous sharing circle, this thesis research aimed to (1) examine Indigenous youths' perspectives on the actions that can be taken in response to the MMIWG crisis and (2) investigate the impact of engaging in the MMIWG March on Indigenous youth. Adopting a strength-based framework and guided by Indigenous methodology, this research focuses on how Indigenous youth can adapt and thrive in the face of adversity or trauma, thereby transforming their grief into resiliency, meaning, and purpose. This project aligned with a community-based participatory approach, where community members were equitable partners throughout the research process. Data was recorded, transcribed, and thematically analyzed. Data analysis resulted in four themes, consisting of (1) the Importance of Acknowledgement and Awareness, (2) Systems of Power and Influence, (3) Historical and Ongoing Injustices, and (4) Resiliency and Healing. These findings demonstrate the potential of the March as a culturally grounded, community-based intervention that can enhance well-being, and outline strategic actions that can be taken in response to the MMIWG crisis. Including Indigenous youth as active agents of change and generating knowledge regarding Indigenous resilience directly challenges the deficit-based narratives that dominate research across disciplines providing Indigenous youth with opportunities to transform their narratives to reflect their strengths and reclaim their sense of identity.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Jasmine Kowalewski. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta's Research Ethics Board 1, Project Name "Exploring the Effects of Activism: Promoting Indigenous Youth's Voices," Pro00128067, May 2, 2023.

Acknowledgements

I would like to start my thesis with a few acknowledgments. First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the students who participated in this project. This project would not be possible without you. Your courage, openness, and willingness to share your stories have been invaluable to this research. I am humbled by the strength and resilience you demonstrated, and I am deeply inspired by your voices. Your insights have not only shaped this project but have also provided a powerful testament to resiliency and healing. Thank you for trusting me with your experiences, for your honesty, and for the meaningful conversations that enriched this work.

Second, I would like to acknowledge my supervisor, Melissa Tremblay. Melissa, thank you for our enriching meetings, where you provided invaluable guidance. The countless hours you spent reviewing my research proposals and early drafts were appreciated. You pushed me to believe in myself by providing numerous opportunities and resources to further my academic journey. More than that, it supported me in my personal growth journey. Our conversations helped me process and navigate my own challenges with identity, encouraging me to be introspective and reflective. All great skills of a qualitative researcher. You are an incredible supervisor and a role model. Your support has been a significant part of my journey, and I am truly grateful. I have become a fan girl of your approach and mentorships.

Third, I wish to extend my heartfelt appreciation to Old Lady Bear That Beautifies Where She Walks In The Bush, also known as Charis Auger. Your role in this project went far beyond a community member in this project, you were its roots. Without your invaluable contributions, completing this thesis would have been far more challenging. You created a safe and welcoming space that was also nurturing, allowing everyone involved to feel respected, connected, and

valued. Beyond this project, your guiding and supportive presence shined before, during, and after the project's lifespan. Your passion for activism and commitment to supporting Indigenous youth is deeply inspiring; it brings tears to my eyes. It has been an honour to witness your dedication. Thank you for sharing that with me.

Fourth, I would also like to extend my profound gratitude to Inner City High School (ICHS), my partner in this project. ICHS's consistent participation in the MMIWG march with their staff and students over the past four years has been inspiring. My initial experience at the MMIWG march, shared with the school, opened my eyes and heart, sparking the inspiration for this project. Additionally, thank you for entrusting me with the privilege of becoming a part of your community. Your openness and support have been crucial in shaping both the direction and success of this work. It is with deep appreciation that I acknowledge your significant contribution, not just in terms of partnership but also in the invaluable role you play in fostering awareness and change.

Fifth, I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to my family, friends, and partner for their support throughout my master's degree. Your love, encouragement, and belief in my abilities have been the pillars that kept me motivated and focused. Words fall short to express my gratitude for your presence in my life. Each of you played a unique and important role in this journey, and I am deeply appreciative of your support.

Lastly, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the various funders who generously provided financial support for my thesis. A special thank you to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) through the Canada Graduate Scholarships, Research Impact Canada (RIC) for the Engaged Scholarship Award, and the Women and Children's Health Research Institute (WCHRI) for the Patient and Community Engagement Training Award

Program. Your support was not just financial; it was a testament to my research and its potential impact.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In Canada, there is a disproportionate number of Indigenous women and girls who experience violence, compared to those who are non-Indigenous (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls [National Inquiry], 2019). Indigenous women are three times more likely to be the victims of violent acts than non-Indigenous women (Feminist Alliance for International Action and Native Women's Association of Canada [FAFIA & NWAC], 2016). Indigenous women and girls are also more likely to go missing and not be found (National Inquiry, 2019). This thesis seeks to explore the voices and resilience of Indigenous youth against this backdrop of enduring violence and loss. By utilizing a community-based participatory approach and embracing Indigenous methodologies, this study emphasizes the active roles that Indigenous youth can assume in articulating their views on necessary actions and the impacts of participating in the MMIWG Marches. These Marches not only commemorate victims but also act as a form of resilience, aiming to foster healing and drive transformative change within communities. Through this work, I aim to illuminate the ways in which these young individuals transform their traumatic experiences into narratives of strength and agency, thereby challenging the prevailing deficit-focused narratives and enriching our understanding of their unique perspectives and aspirations. This chapter provides an introduction and orientation to my thesis. First, I describe the research partnership with Inner City High School that was integral to this project, and outline my research purpose statement and research questions. Next, I share my positionality as a researcher, describe the importance of reflexivity, and share reflections on my own privilege as well as a journal reflection in relation to this project.

Partnership with Inner City High School

Inner City High School (ICHS) is an accredited high school in central Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, and represents the community partner for this project. ICHS provides opportunities for structurally marginalized urban youth living in Edmonton, including Indigenous youth, so they can earn a high school diploma and develop important skills. Many of the students at ICHS have first-hand experiences with intergenerational trauma and ICHS offers a wraparound program, providing both educational and non-educational supports to students. A wraparound program represents a comprehensive approach to meeting the varied needs of students, such as academic, physical, mental health, cultural, and legal needs. Non-educational supports include, but are not limited to, foodbank access, addiction supports, housing supports, counselling, and after school outreach. Over 80% of the students at ICHS are Indigenous.

One unique way ICHS meets the diverse needs of their students is by incorporating student relevant field trips, such as annual participation in the MMIWG March. ICHS began attending the MMIWG March with students and staff in 2019, spending the whole day in downtown Edmonton raising awareness and honouring and speaking the names of missing and murdered Indigenous people. This field trip was one way the school was able to respond to students' cultural and spiritual needs, as many of the students had personal experience with MMIWG.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this thesis research was to include Indigenous youth as active agents of change, promote their voices, and provide opportunities for Indigenous youth to empower themselves and take action on the issues that impact them. In addition, we aimed to explore the effects of engaging in the MMIWG March among Indigenous youth.

Community and cultural activities can support an individual's sense of belonging and cultivate a collective identity (Anderson, 2016; Lopez-Carmen et al., 2019; Njeze et al., 2020; Okpalauwaekwe et al., 2022; Parsloe & Campbell, 2021). This allows for individuals to create further meaning from their traumatic experiences and become increasingly empowered (Okpalauwaekwe et al., 2022; Parsloe & Campbell, 2021). As such, we anticipated that Indigenous youth who attended the MMIWG March might build upon their sense of identity, feel increasingly empowered, and create further meaning of their experiences, with implications for their well-being. This context led to two research questions:

1. What are the perspectives of Indigenous youth at ICHS with respect to actions that can be taken in response to the MMIWG crisis?

2. How can attending the MMIWG March affect Indigenous youth at ICHS?

Positionality

I am of mixed ancestry. My single Indigenous mother had me at 15-years-old and our family's history is one of resiliency and loss. My grandfather was part of the "60's Scoop". At birth, my grandfather was forcefully taken away from his mother, never to be reunited. Although my grandfather was adopted into a loving German family, the disconnect from our Indigenous culture left a void in our lineage. Our sense of community and culture was taken away from our family.

My biological father is Ethiopian. He was absent from my life, and I never knew Ethiopian culture. Once again, I was left not knowing who I was. My community and culture remained unknown. Despite self-identifying as Indigenous and Ethiopian, I had little to no connection with my roots, and this left me with a hole. I did not know who I was or where I fit in. When others would ask, "What is your background?" I did not know how to respond. As a

person of colour, it was harrowing feeling different and experiencing racism, yet not having a community and culture to ground you. This insider-outsider perspective showed me the profound importance of belonging, and how closely it ties to one's sense of self and overall well-being.

My journey towards self-discovery took a significant turn in 2023 when I started working as a Psychology Assistant at ICHS and connecting with Indigenous peoples. At the school, I was immersed into Indigenous culture. We started and finished every day in a circle. I found the smell of smudge comforting. I greatly appreciated being part of ceremony and witnessing students beading and ribbon skirt-making with the Elder. As an insider-outsider, I was grateful for the opportunity to learn about Indigenous culture.

An inspirational moment during my time at ICHS, included attending the MMIWG March. After the March, we gathered together in Beaver Hills House Park, and I witnessed Indigenous students gather the strength to honour their loved ones and speak about their trauma in front of hundreds of people. It made me question how they found such courage. While I did not know the answer to that question, it was clear they were empowered to speak on their grief. In this moment, I realized Indigenous youth are much stronger than their oppression; they are resilient. I wanted the world to see this. Not only did I have a deep appreciation for this moment, but this moment became the inspiration for my thesis topic.

As a researcher, my insider-outsider status compels me to embrace culture within my research. Knowing how crucial belonging, connection, and culture are, I approach my work with a deep appreciation for these elements. I strive to ensure that my research not only captures these themes but also supports the cultural and communal contexts of those I work with.

While entering my master's degree, I was inspired to conduct Indigenous research, aiming to highlight the resilience of Indigenous youth and the impact of events like the MMIWG

March. My goal is to systematically capture an inspiring moment, showcase the strength of Indigenous youth to the world, and use my academic platform for systemic change. As a part-Indigenous woman, my life experiences and background fuel my commitment to promote the voices of Indigenous youth, investigate the effects of engaging in the MMIWG March among Indigenous youth, and advocating for meaningful change.

Importance of Reflexivity in Qualitative, Community-Based, and Indigenous Research

Reflexivity is about examining researchers' roles in their work (Palaganas et al., 2017). Reflexivity can be considered a concept and a process. As a concept, reflexivity signifies a particular level of consciousness, involving self-awareness and a recognition that researchers exist within society, and therefore they are a part of the social world they study (Palaganas et al., 2017). As a process, reflexivity comprises introspection and embraces subjectivity throughout the research process (Palaganas et al., 2017). Through continuous self-reflection, the researcher aims to identify and understand how their values, assumptions, and positionality affect aspects of their research (Palaganas et al., 2017). Overall, the goal of reflexivity is to reveal the complexities of the multidirectional relationships between the researcher and the participants (Palaganas et al., 2017).

In the realm of Indigenous research, reflexivity is especially important (Nilson, 2017). Given the historical and ongoing oppression and discrimination Indigenous peoples experience worldwide, it is essential for researchers to be reflexive so they may identify and understand how colonization and/or systemic racism continues to influence research (Nison, 2017). Additionally, reflexivity ensures core values of Indigenous research including "reciprocity, respect, equality, responsibility, survival and protection, and spirit and integrity" are maintained (Nilson, 2017, p. 119). In addition to these considerations, the role of self-identity in reflexivity is essential in

Indigenous research. Reflexivity enhances a researcher's understanding of themselves, their biography, and how participants perceive their attitudes, actions, and responses (Nilson, 2017). Thus, researchers can better navigate interpersonal dynamics and honour values inherent in Indigenous contexts by engaging in transparency.

Confronting My Own Assumptions

Conducting qualitative research, especially community-based and Indigenous research, has profoundly changed me by challenging my assumptions and biases, and teaching me the importance of cultural safety and reflexivity.

Teachings from the Elder. One significant experience that highlighted my assumptions and biases occurred during my initial attempt to incorporate a sharing circle and ceremony in my research. I had planned to conduct a sharing circle ceremony at the school with an Elder. At this point in the research process, I took an informal approach when discussing the research process due to having a pre-existing relationship with the Elder and other community members. Moreover, I assumed that Western research approaches, such as using standard consent forms and audio recording, would be acceptable.

However, upon my arrival, the Elder expressed discomfort with the use of consent forms and recording the ceremony. She further stated that she was comfortable with notetaking only after the ceremony concluded. In this moment, I was stunned – not by the Elder's words, but by my own naivety and misjudgement. Despite engaging in dialogue with community members and practicing reflexivity, I had overlooked critical cultural considerations.

This experience compelled me to reflect deeply on my assumptions and biases both in the moment and long after. My thoughts linked consent forms with treaties. I realized, regrettably, that these Western forms are symbolically tied to the colonial treaties that were used to harm

Indigenous peoples. Additionally, I recognized that these forms did not align with the oral tradition in Indigenous cultures, where spoken words and personal interactions carry significant weight and trust.

Reflecting on this experience later, other assumptions came to light. My informal approach to the pre-research discussion had been influenced by my previous relationship with the Elder and school. This approach led to me inadequately addressing the depth and specifics of the process, highlighting a significant gap in my understanding. Moreover, I had overlooked the possibility that the Elder might mistrust research, including associated institutions and researchers (rightfully so). This acknowledgement of mistrust calls for a more formal in-depth discussion about needs, desires, and expectations.

Another assumption was that the Elder would be comfortable with the Western research practices that I had taken for granted. My colonial education had made me blind to these nuances. The ingrained nature of this education prevented me from foreseeing the Elder's discomfort and the cultural inappropriateness of my approach. This experience highlighted how deeply embedded these colonial perspectives are, affecting my ability to fully understand and respect Indigenous cultural practices.

I am very grateful for the Elder's honesty, as this experience helped challenge my assumptions and biases, teaching me the critical importance of cultural safety and reflexivity in conducting research. It showed me how deeply embedded colonial perspectives can hinder understanding and respect for Indigenous cultural practices, emphasizing the need to actively deconstruct these biases. Overall, it is essential to acknowledge that mistakes may still occur. So, when they do, you can take accountability, reflect, and uncover the lessons to be learned.

Learning in Ceremony. A second significant experience that highlighted my assumptions and biases occurred after listening to the Elder's feedback. It was important for me to take accountability for my oversight and lean into the Elder's feedback to improve my approach. I vividly remember grappling with two ways to handle my emotions. I could let myself be overwhelmed not only by shame but also the hindrance of not having data for my thesis or I could embrace the learning experience. I chose the latter, feeling grateful for the Elder's honesty and the chance to participate in the ceremony.

The ceremony was profoundly impactful, evoking grief, catharses, and a deep sense of connection with the others in the circle. We shared tears and hugs. I had never felt such a strong spiritual connection before. After taking notes later that day, I began reflecting on ceremony. I noted how being raised atheist and being disconnected from my Indigenous heritage, made it difficult to foresee this profound impact and associated challenges. No amount of reading could have prepared me for this experience. Then I realized; given the ceremony's profound nature, it did not feel ethical to use ceremonial data. It seemed inappropriate to translate this experience into mere words in a thesis. After consulting with my supervisor, Dr. Tremblay, and community member, Charis Auger, we decided it was not appropriate to use the data from ceremony.

This experience was a humble reminder of the need to practice cultural safety, respect, and continuous learning in research. My assumptions and biases were challenged, further teaching me the importance of reflexivity. By choosing not to use the ceremonial data, I demonstrated respect and integrity, which is a critical aspect of conducting qualitative, community-based, and Indigenous research.

Unlearning Colonial Research Values. A third significant experience that challenged my assumptions and biases came from the guidance of my supervisor, Dr. Tremblay, and the

insightful questions posed by my defense committee. With their feedback, I further uncovered how deeply embedded Western research values had infiltrated my writing style and approach to my thesis. This process of reflection revealed the assumptions and biases I held, many of which were tied to these colonial research values.

I found these biases manifested in the way I intentionally and unintentionally structured the first draft of my thesis, even in the language I used. For example, I realized that I often reverted to a writing style that prioritized objectivity and impersonality—core values of Western research. I avoided using "I" or incorporating elements of my personal journey. I was taught to believe that these concepts were not essential or important to include, as they did not relate to the research questions nor the findings. I now see, this stylistic choice reflects not only my position but also the underlying beliefs and values I had internalized. While writing this thesis, I also struggled to find appropriate terminology to express the research processes. Familiar colonial research terms like "collecting data" or "using participants" felt inadequate and inappropriate to describe the research journey, which was deeply relational and grounded in community.

In reflecting on this, I recognize that this journey has been as much about unlearning and relearning as it has been about learning. It has required me to critically examine and deconstruct the colonial influences on my research approach and to embrace a more authentic and culturally respectful approach. Upon starting this project, I did not realize I was commencing a journey of self-discovery, involving understanding how I shaped and was shaped by the research process. In all, I have seen the power of reflexivity to enrich not only the research process and its outcome but also the researcher. I want to invite all researchers, or even all people up for the challenge, to embrace feeling uncomfortable and engage in reflexivity, as it will truly change you as a person and transform the work you do.

Recognizing My Own Privilege

Reflecting on my personal context and the privileges that have shaped my experiences, I recognize several aspects of my life that have granted me perspectives and opportunities that are not universally shared. Raised in a working-class family where my basic needs were always met, I was afforded a foundational stability that many do not enjoy. This stability was crucial in me navigating the challenges of understanding my mixed heritage—Indigenous and Ethiopian—especially in the absence of a direct cultural connection to either. Throughout my life, I have benefitted from a support system comprised of friends and family who have guided and stood by me, offering emotional and practical support that contributed to my resilience and pursuit of higher education.

The educational opportunities I accessed have not only enriched my knowledge but also provided platforms for me to voice concerns and contribute to discourses that affect Indigenous communities. Moreover, having lighter skin has, in many contexts, shielded me from the more severe forms of discrimination that darker-skinned individuals face, influencing my interactions and the reception of my academic and professional endeavors. These elements of privilege—economic stability, support networks, educational access, and societal perceptions based on skin color—have undeniably shaped my journey and my ability to engage deeply with my thesis topic.

As I reflect on this privilege, it is clear that my positionality influences both the lens through which I view my research and the interactions I have within the academic and broader communities. Recognizing these privileges compels me to approach my research with a heightened sense of responsibility—to use the advantages I have had to amplify the voices of

those who are less heard and to contribute meaningfully to discussions and actions that aim to redress the injustices faced by Indigenous peoples.

Journal Reflection Example from October 14th, 2023

In order to showcase the importance of reflexivity and the processes I engaged in, I would like to provide an excerpt from one of my journal entries. This particular entry was written after a session with the Patient and Community Engagement Training Program (PaCET), reflecting on my experiences:

It was really nice to be in a room with people who are going through similar experiences (i.e., conducting Indigenous Research). I thought that maybe I was not the right person for [Indigenous research] work because of my own insecurities and fear that I won't be able to overcome my own identity [challenges]. But I see other people in the [Patient and Community Engagement Training Program (PaCET)] group that are going through the same experiences, which is reassuring. It's interesting to hear that other people are also changing, as they progress through their own academic experiences... This makes me think. When did academics get so hard? When did learning become so emotionally taxing? In school, I knew I could always overcome challenges just by studying more. But now academics requires me to overcome a personal barrier of my own identity. I need to become more comfortable saying who I am. Otherwise, I am not being truthful. It is important to be truthful about who I am as a person and as a researcher to my participants. Now, there is the question; What if I can't overcome this personal barrier? Does it mean I cannot progress through my academic journey? When did personal growth and academic growth become so intertwined, that one cannot progress without the other? When did this intertwine make things so difficult that I contemplate giving up all

together? ... I know that I cannot do that. My values don't allow me to take that path. I

know that I should choose to do work because it is important, not because it is easy…

Through this journal reflection, the integration of personal growth with academic

development is illustrated. The ongoing practice of reflexivity not only challenges me but also

enriches my understanding and respect for the research process, ensuring that I approach it with

integrity and a deep sense of responsibility towards the participants and the community. Having

established a broad context for this project, the next chapter of this thesis provides a review of

the literature to further situate this project in the academic literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following section will explore how the MMIWG crisis is deeply rooted in colonialism, historical trauma, and systemic racism. This chapter starts by reviewing the traditional roles of Indigenous women in pre-colonial societies. With colonization came the forced imposition of patriarchal values that impacted Indigenous peoples and their communities. I will then examine how colonial policies like the Indian Act, Residential Schools, and the Sixties Scoop contributed to the MMIWG crisis, and how Indigenous resistance has persisted through such events. This chapter will also discuss the resistance and activism that have emerged in response to the MMIWG crisis, including art installations, social media campaigns, and Marches. Lastly, this chapter will address the gap in the literature, particularly the lack of research on the impact of MMIWG activism on Indigenous youth, which led to this project.

Colonization and Historical Trajectories of the MMIWG Crisis

The overrepresentation of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG) is rooted in colonialism, historical trauma, and racism (FAFIA & NWAC, 2016). Prior to colonization, many Indigenous communities across North America were gynocentric, meaning women were at the center of their communities (Gallagher, 2020). Indigenous women were commonly seen in positions of authority, made political decisions, and were recognized for performing large amounts of labour for their communities (Gallagher, 2020).

For communities that were not gynocentric, many maintained balanced and egalitarian gender roles, with men and women sharing responsibilities and authority (Ejimofor, 2023; Goodell Ugalde, 2023). In these communities, Indigenous women played critical roles contributing significantly to their societies through activities such as food gathering, child rearing, and ceremonial practices (Ejimofor, 2023; Goodell Ugalde 2023). Ejimofor (2023)

explains that, across North America, there were more than 500 distinct tribes, each characterized by distinct social structures, languages, and cultural practices. The roles and status of women differed across these tribes. In some, women held significant leadership positions and enjoyed considerable autonomy in making decisions, while in others, they had more "obedient" roles to men. For example, the Kalapuya had a form of "patrilineal governance" that was less rigid than settler patriarchy; the Ojibwe practiced an egalitarian system with specific roles for genders; the Apache generally rejected fixed gender roles; and the Navajo were known for the flexible views on gender identity (Goodell Ugalde 2023).

In many Indigenous societies, gender diversity was widely accepted and embraced before European colonization (Le Duigou, 2000). For example, the term Two-Spirited, though relatively modern, represents an ancient tradition acknowledged by numerous Indigenous cultures (Harris & Dog, 1993). Two-Spirit individuals held esteemed roles within their communities, often seen as integral members who contributed significantly to social and spiritual life (Cameron, 2005; Le Duigou, 2000; Harris & Dog, 1993). They were revered as mediators and healers, possessing a unique balance between male and female energies that gave them special gifts and strengths beyond those of either men or women alone (Le Duigou, 2000).

Regardless of the various social structures of Indigenous communities, the Indigenous ways of life were fundamentally different from that of European settlers, primarily due to the strict patriarchal and binary views on gender espoused by Europeans (Gallagher, 2020; Le Duigou, 2000). European societies demanded clear, hierarchical distinctions between genders, imposed patriarchal family structures, while vilifying and persecuting those who defied traditional gender roles or sexual orientation (Le Duigou, 2000). This stark contrast in beliefs, driven by colonial and patriarchal values, has had lasting impacts on Indigenous communities

and their perceptions of gender and sexuality. During early contact and colonization, Gallagher (2020) explains that European settlers imposed patriarchal values through various governmental policies and legislation, such as the Indian Act. As a result, traditional Indigenous gender roles were deeply affected, and gendered violence became an instrument for colonial oppression. These foundational acts of genocide not only disrupted Indigenous societies but also set the stage for the grossly disproportionate number of MMIWG we see today (Gallagher, 2020; Uren, 2022).

Colonial Onset and Violence Against Indigenous Peoples

Initially, Indigenous peoples and European settlers engaged in cooperative relationships, particularly through the fur trade, which was mutually beneficial and involved a level of partnership (Kirk, 1984). Indigenous women played crucial roles during this time, serving as important intermediaries and negotiators, and facilitating trade by marrying European fur traders, which helped to establish and maintain alliances (Kirk, 1984). However, as the population of European settlers in Canada rose in the 16th and 17th centuries, so did the demand for land and resources (Nutton & Fast, 2015). This growing demand led to a shift in the settlers' approach, moving from cooperation to colonization, which ultimately aimed to permanently secure Indigenous lands and resources through any means necessary (Palmater, 2014). The shift brought violence and genocide against Indigenous peoples, with the start of colonization being a "period of the premeditated murder of Indigenous peoples" (Uren, 2022, p.182). One example of early Indian policy that legalized the murder of Indigenous peoples was the *Scalping Proclamation of 1749* (Cornwallis, 1749). This proclamation involved the then Governor of Nova Scotia, Governor Cornwallis, offering a monetary reward for every Mi'kmaw man, woman, and child killed (Cornwallis, 1749). This scalping bounty resulted in the Mi'kmaw

population being reduced by 80 percent and is one of many examples in which genocide was legalized (Palmater, 2014). Another method of genocide that was used against Indigenous peoples was the use of "biological weapons" (American Medical Association [AMA], 1999). In the 16th century, colonial troops intentionally gave smallpox-infested blankets to Indigenous communities, resulting in the loss of around 50% of the population in specific Indigenous communities (AMA, 1999).

In the early years of European colonization, the arrival of settlers led to a dramatic decrease in the number of Indigenous peoples, with roughly 57% of the population lost within the first few years (Uren, 2022). Among these groups, the Beothuk people of present-day Newfoundland faced extreme vilification and violence (Holly, 2000; Palmater, 2014). Described as "dangerous and sub-human" by colonial governments, they were relentlessly persecuted and killed (Palmater, 2014). Despite this brutal treatment, the Beothuk actively resisted European settlers, employing strategies to adapt and survive under increasing pressure (Holly, 2000). Despite the resistance, Shanawdithit, the last known Beothuk, died in 1829 (Holly, 2000).

The horrific acts carried out through colonization reveal the pattern of dehumanization of Indigenous peoples by colonial settlers. This pattern of dehumanization was magnified for Indigenous women and girls. Settlers diminished the power of Indigenous women and girls by labeling them as "licentious morally corrupt squaws", which they contrasted against the purity of white women (García-Del Moral et al., 2023). Maria Campbell stated at the 2008 Conference on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women: "Misogyny is now ingrained in Aboriginal life, the seed of its life course in the word squaw changing our people's lives and history forever." These views that labelled Indigenous women and girls as subhuman not only justified their legal

murder but also perpetuated minimization of these crimes, embedding a lasting stigma against Indigenous people, particularly women and girls (Uren, 2022).

This dehumanization has had enduring effects, contributing significantly to the systemic racism and discrimination Indigenous peoples face today (Uren, 2022). This pattern is illustrated by the crisis of MMIWG, where pervasive societal indifference and devaluation of Indigenous women and girls has led to racialized and gendered violence, inadequate investigations of violence against Indigenous women and girls, and lack of justice for these women and girls and their families, and those who perpetrate against them (García-Del Moral et al., 2023). Police frequently dismiss cases involving missing Indigenous women and girls, particularly those considered to live "high risk" lifestyles (Draper, 2022; García-Del Moral et al., 2023). Many of these violent cases go unresolved without charges being filed (Draper, 2022). Moreover, there are disturbing reports of law enforcement officers themselves abusing Indigenous women and girls without facing any consequences (Draper, 2022; García-Del Moral et al., 2023). The chants from the MMIWG marches, "We are not trash. Search the landfills," reflect resistance against the dehumanizing and ongoing attitudes introduced by colonial settlers. The chants expose the reality that Indigenous women and girls are often treated with the same disregard and disposability as they were by the settlers who perpetrated acts of violence and genocide against Indigenous peoples long ago.

Colonial Policies of Forced Assimilation

In the mid-1800s, colonization evolved to also encompass forced displacement and assimilation of Indigenous peoples through the implementation of various policies such as the Indian Act, Residential Schools, and the Sixties Scoop (Uren, 2022). These policies, amongst others, contributed to the loss of culture and community, imposition of patriarchal norms, and

social and economic marginalization, which have differentially impacted Indigenous women and girls and are directly tied to the MMIWG crisis. While Indigenous men and boys have faced the same policies as women and girls, the experiences and impacts of these policies differ significantly for women and girls due to their distinct, gendered social, cultural, and economic contexts.

The Indian Act. The Indian Act is a Canadian federal law designed to define, control, and assimilate Indigenous peoples into the settler colonial state (Palmater, 2014). The Indian Act legalized state genocidal practices to systematically destroy Indigenous cultures and communities through regulation of Indian status, bands, and reserves and practices therein (Uren, 2022). The Indian Act replaced traditional Indigenous governance and cultural practices with those based on patriarchy, leading to the systemic marginalization of Indigenous women and girls and contributing to the MMIWG crisis (Uren, 2022; García-Del Moral et al., 2023).

The Loss of Culture and Community. One of the principal features of the Indian Act was its disruption of traditional Indigenous governance and cultural practices, leading to a significant loss of community cohesion (Uren, 2022). From its inception, the Indian Act classified a wide array of diverse Indigenous nations under the single term "Indians," initiating strict regulations of their identities (Sterritt, 2007). This act not only stripped Indigenous peoples of their unique identities and rights, including the rights to practice traditional ceremonies and uphold their own political institutions, but also transferred control of their lands to the government (Sterritt, 2007). Indigenous women, who often held essential roles of leaders, knowledge-keepers, and caregivers, were significantly impacted (Ramnarine, 2023). The Act's bans on potlatches and other cultural ceremonies, which were vital for sharing oral history and cultural traditions, specifically targeted these roles (Uren, 2022). By banning these gatherings, the Canadian

government deprived Indigenous communities of their means to transmit cultural knowledge and practices. In addition, these policies limited Indigenous peoples' access to traditional land used for hunting and fishing, and the lands given to Indigenous communities were of poorer quality, which were not conducive to farming or food production (McKenzie et al., 2016). Overall, these policies were clear tactics of Indigenous elimination and assimilation (García-Del Moral et al., 2023). These legal mechanisms prohibited generations of Indigenous peoples from learning their cultures and resulted in long-term impacts on identity and community cohesion (Uren, 2022).

   Forced Patriarchy. Another way the Indian Act attempted to eliminate and assimilate Indigenous peoples was through the regulation of Indian status (Ramnarine, 2023). The Act dictated who was recognized as an "Indian" and who was not, a mechanism that allowed the government to exert control over Indigenous identity and community membership (Ramnarine, 2023). This regulation of status forced patriarchal norms by "imposing inferior status" and "gender-based restrictions" on Indigenous women (Uren, 2022). For instance, until 1985, Indigenous women's status was tied to their husbands (Ramnarine, 2023; Uren, 2022). This meant that Indigenous women would lose status if they married a non-Indigenous man, became widowed, or separated from their husbands. These women also lost access to land and finances, and had their connections to culture, family, and community severed. In contrast, Indigenous men would retain all rights and resources regardless of who they married (Ramnarine, 2023; Uren, 2022). Under the Indian Act, the loss of status for Indigenous women remained in place from 1951 to 1985, meaning women could not regain status after becoming widowed or divorced. This policy also extended to their children, impacting around 16,000 women and tens of thousands of children (Ramnarine, 2023). This patriarchal enforcement replaced traditional

ways of being for Indigenous peoples while also impacting the dignity and independence of Indigenous women and girls (Uren, 2022).

      Social and Economic Marginalization of Indigenous Women and Girls. The Indian Act had a profound and lasting impact, leading to the disproportional social and economic marginalization of Indigenous women and girls, due to the loss of culture, community, status, and resource rights (García-Del Moral et al., 2023). Ramnarine (2023) explains that, socially, the Indian Act disrupted the traditional roles of Indigenous women and girls by undermining their social importance within their communities. Furthermore, the patriarchal policies of the Indian Act entrenched perceptions of the inferiority of Indigenous women and girls, heightening their vulnerability to social exclusion (Ramnarine, 2023). Economically, the Indian Act marginalized Indigenous women by tying their status, rights, and resources to their marital status. By taking away their access to Indigenous knowledge and community resources, such as land, the Canadian government attempted to steal independence from Indigenous women and girls, thereby creating systemic barriers and in many cases, contributing to long-term economic dependency and poverty (García-Del Moral et al., 2023).

      Connection to the MMIWG Crisis. The cultural disruptions, forced patriarchy, and socioeconomic marginalization caused by the Indian Act have directly contributed to the MMIWG crisis. The Indian Act's policies not only deprived Indigenous women of their autonomy and fractured their identities, but also dismantled vital social and economic supports, making them more susceptible to violence and exploitation (Uren, 2022). For instance, the loss of status, resources, and support has placed Indigenous women and girls at heightened risk for human trafficking, a contributing factor to the disproportionate number of MMIWG (García-Del Moral et al., 2023). Furthermore, forced patriarchal systems have devalued Indigenous women

and girls, setting the foundation for the increased rates of murder and violence against Indigenous women and girls today (Uren, 2022).

Resistance. Myriad examples of Indigenous resistance to the Indian Act exist, including Indigenous peoples' reclamation and affirmation of their rights and identities. Indigenous communities often resisted by ignoring oppressive governmental restrictions impacting their self-determination and cultural practices (Belshaw et al., 2016). For example, the Mi'kmaq community actively opposed over fifty years of Canada's governance through resistance, eluding restrictive laws, and, occasionally, leveraging aspects of these laws when advantageous (Belshaw et al., 2016). Similarly, in western regions, ceremonies such as the potlatch and Sun Dance continued quietly despite official bans, which allowed for communities to preserve their cultural traditions discreetly (Belshaw et al., 2016). Historical protests also marked the resistance timeline. In 1872, the Grand Council of Ontario and Quebec Indians articulated their objections clearly, demanding amendments to ensure that Indian women could marry freely without losing their tribal status and associated rights—a protest illustrating the early recognition of gendered discrimination within the Act (Jamieson 1978, Sterritt, 2007).

These forms of resistance continue, with two of the most notable instances of resistance against discriminatory policies of the Indian Act involving Mary Two-Axe Earley and Sandra Lovelace (Busatta, 2018; Holmes, 1987; Sterritt, 2007). Mary Two-Axe Earley, a Mohawk woman from Kahnawake, Quebec, was a pioneering activist who began her work in the 1960s (Busatta, 2018). She tirelessly fought against the Indian Act's provisions that stripped Indigenous women of their status if they married non-Indigenous men and became the first woman to have her status reinstated (Busatta, 2018). Similarly, Sandra Lovelace became internationally recognized when she brought her case to the United Nations (UN) after being forced out of her

community due to discriminatory policies of the Indian Act (Holmes, 1987; Sterritt, 2007). Her case highlighted the violation of international human rights standards, with the UN ruling that the Act led to a denial of her cultural rights (Holmes, 1987; Sterritt, 2007). This international pressure, along with the efforts of activists like Mary Two-Axe Earley, led Canada to amend the discriminatory policies within the Indian Act, such as the passage of Bill C-31 in 1985 that amended the Indian Act to restore status to affect women and their children (Busatta, 2018; Holmes, 1987; Sterritt, 2007).

        Residential Schools. Residential schools in Canada were established to assimilate Indigenous peoples, while also aiming to destroy the cultural and social structures of Indigenous communities. These institutions, created by the Canadian government and run by Christian churches, sought to ingrain Euro-Canadian and Christian culture in Indigenous children (Uren, 2022). In most cases, Indigenous children were forced to leave their homes and were mandated to stay in residential schools for a minimum of 10 months each year. By 1920, the Indian Act required all status First Nations children, aged 7 to 15, to attend these schools (McKenzie et al., 2016). Additionally, Métis, Inuit, and non-status First Nations children were also forced to attend, with some exceptions (McKenzie et al., 2016). From the mid-19th century until the late 20th century, more than 150,000 Indigenous children were forced to attend these schools (Robertson, 2018). It is widely recognized that the residential school system was an act of genocide due to the government's deliberate effort to eradicate Indigenous peoples (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015; Palmater, 2014; Uren, 2022; Ramnarine, 2023; Robertson, 2018). The government's mission was to "kill the Indian in the children" using any means necessary (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2006). This systemic violence and cultural erasure paralleled the objectives of the Indian Act, which aimed to replace traditional Indigenous

cultures and communities with patriarchal systems, further marginalizing Indigenous women and girls and contributing to the MMIWG crisis (Uren, 2022).

 The Loss of Culture and Community. One goal of residential schools was to erase the culture and community of younger generations by forcibly removing and abducting children from their homes. Indigenous children were prevented from growing up with their families and within their communities, prohibited from speaking their languages and recognizing their identities (Uren, 2022). For example, upon arrival Indigenous children had their hair cut short and their clothes exchanged for school uniforms (McKenzie et al., 2016). This upheaval restricted their ability to learn traditional knowledge and practices, while also wounding their sense of belonging and community (Uren, 2022). There are some reports that these impacts were felt even more acutely by girls since they were generally watched more closely than boys (Robertson, 2018). Furthermore, the upheaval caused by residential schools broke the transmission of important traditions to future generations (Arvin et al., 2013), such as Indigenous knowledge about and approaches to development and parenting (Uren, 2022). Robertson (2018) explains that residential schools were created to erase culture and community by indoctrinating Indigenous children with shame about their identity. Feelings of shame were elicited through constant discrimination and repeated punishment for "acting Indian," such that feelings of inferiority regarding their ethnicity, culture, and community were internalized for Indigenous children (Robertson, 2018). For children who returned to their families after residential schooling, life was not the same. Many had fractured senses of identity and struggled to connect to their loved ones, communities, and cultures (Partridge, 2010).

 Forced Patriarchy. In pursuit of forced assimilation, residential school officials took an oppressive and patriarchal approach with the children, teaching them about rigid gender roles

that devalued women. They provided poor-quality education and instead focused on teaching European gender-stereotyped tasks (Uren, 2022). Instead of receiving proper quality education, Indigenous girls were primarily mandated to do domestic chores, such as cooking and cleaning (Uren, 2022; Robertson, 2018). This was due to the belief that females were destined for lower status employment (Robertson, 2018). In addition, Indigenous girls were always closely watched by the nuns (Robertson, 2018), further reinforcing perceptions of their inferior status and limiting their freedom. Meanwhile, Indigenous boys were allowed more freedom, often working outside in the fields or barns unsupervised (Robertson, 2018; Uren, 2022). Another way patriarchal values were forced onto Indigenous children was through abuse, which devalued and dehumanized them. It was said that Indigenous girls experienced "double-sided abuse" because they were punished for being both Indigenous and female (Robertson, 2018). For example, many priests, nurses, and nuns monitored the Indigenous girls' menstrual cycles closely, and questioned them monthly to ensure they were not pregnant. The intensive monitoring was based on the prejudiced view that Indigenous women were overly driven by their passions and considered sexually impure (Robertson, 2018). According to Robertson (2018), given the religious foundation of residential schools, the majority of the abuse experienced by Indigenous girls stemmed from the expectation that females were "pure and modest". For instance, some highly religious schools conducted virginity tests on girls, and if the test failed, girls faced severe consequences, including physical punishment and public humiliation by the entire school for being considered impure (Robertson, 2018). This highlights how the value of females was determined by patriarchal standards, with the ideals of virginity and modesty trumping their general well-being.

In addition to these forms of punishment, Indigenous girls were also victims of sexual assault by staff and other students (Robertson, 2018). In fact, the Supreme Court Justice Douglas Hogarth called one residential school supervisor a "sexual terrorist" due to the large number of sexual abuses reported (Sedehi, 2019). However, when girls spoke about the abuse to authorities their calls were often ignored (Robertson, 2018). Silencing the girls about their abuse served to further devalue Indigenous women and girls.

Social and Economic Marginalization of Indigenous Women and Girls. Similar to the Indian Act, residential schools added to the social and economic marginalization of Indigenous women and girls that persist to this day. Forced placement in residential schools led Indigenous women and girls to feel socially and culturally disconnected and weakened their support systems (Partridge, 2010; Robertson, 2018), with long-lasting effects on their social, cultural, and community ties. Additionally, the harsh abuse perpetrated against Indigenous girls resulted in significant trauma, with intergenerational impacts (Uren, 2022; Robertson, 2018). For many, this trauma manifested as mental health challenges, substance use, and difficulty forming healthy relationships (Robertson, 2018), all of which contribute to further social marginalization. Furthermore, perceptions of gender and racial inferiority forced upon Indigenous children in residential schools led to discrimination of Indigenous women and girls both within and outside their communities (Uren, 2022).

Economically, Indigenous children received an education that was poorer quality than that received by White children in public schools (Uren, 2022). Due to the mandatory curriculum primarily involving religion and gender-specific chores, many Indigenous girls were not taught skills that would prepare them for pursuing their goals. This inadequate education obstructed their ability to be independent and led to increased economic vulnerability, with increased

probability of experiencing poverty, unstable housing, food insecurity, and other socio-economic challenges (Uren, 2022). Additionally, Goodell Ugalde (2023) argues that patriarchal systems imposing a gender-specific division of labor, with Indigenous girls performing unpaid domestic work, became part of the invisible support for the colonization of Canada. This unpaid labor restricted Indigenous women to domestic roles, allowing the government to control and exploit their "bodily autonomy", a characteristic of extractive colonialism that sustained colonial economies and attempting to ensure that Indigenous women and girls maintained and reproduced patriarchal social norms. While residential school officials aimed to assimilate Indigenous peoples, they perpetuated racist and discriminatory attitudes of Euro-Canadians, who refused to "hire, marry, work with, drink with, study with, lend money to, extend the franchise to, or vote for Indigenous people, regardless of whether they were schooled or not" (Belshaw et al., 2016, p.141).

   Connection to the MMIWG Crisis. The forced disconnection of Indigenous women and girls from their communities and cultural roots, a direct result of the residential school system, positioned Indigenous women and girls as particularly vulnerable to various forms of exploitation and violence. Often stripped of their familial and community support networks, these women and girls became easier targets for perpetrators of violence. Indigenous women and girls were often pushed into precarious situations to survive, including high-risk environments where they were more susceptible to violence. Their vulnerability was exacerbated by societal perceptions of Indigenous women as inherently fragile and inferior, making them prime targets for both structural and interpersonal violence (Ramnarine, 2023). Through systemic racial and gender-based discrimination, residential school officials devalued Indigenous lives, particularly the lives of Indigenous women and girls. This devaluation perpetuated societal

norms wherein violence against Indigenous women and girls was overlooked or normalized. For example, Indigenous women who upheld their cultural and theological norms were seen as deviant, and they were punished severely though sexual and physical violence (Goodell Ugalde, 2023). In addition, intergenerational trauma can manifest in various harmful ways, including domestic violence, substance abuse, and ongoing cycles of grief and loss. These factors further perpetuated the conditions that led to higher rates of violence against Indigenous women and girls and collectively created conditions for the ongoing MMIWG crisis.

Resistance. Indigenous resistance to the Canadian residential school system encompassed a wide range of strategies and was deeply influenced by communities' commitment to safeguarding their children. Parents were angry about their children's abuse, distant relocation, cultural alienation, forced excessive labour, lack of proper care, and absence of employment after graduation (Belshaw et al., 2016). Parents actively resisted in various ways (Belshaw et al., 2016; McKenzie et al., 2016). For example, despite potential legal repercussions they would hide their children from authorities to avoid school enrollment, and many advocated for the establishment of day schools within or close to their communities (McKenzie et al., 2016).

In school, children also found ways to resist by running away, stealing food, or subtly undermining the system while outwardly appearing compliant (McKenzie et al., 2016). Additionally, despite the limited education, some girls would go on to use the skills and knowledge gained in residential schools to enhance their roles within and outside their communities (Fiske, 1996). This would include social, economic, and political roles that were previously inaccessible and disapproved of by the missionaries who ran many of these schools (Fiske, 1996). Despite the intense pressures of assimilation, Indigenous resistance ensured that the efforts of churches and governments ultimately failed (McKenzie et al., 2016).

The Sixties Scoop. Similar to the Indian Act and residential schools, the Sixties Scoop emerged as a continuation of colonial assimilatory attempts (McKenzie et al., 2016). The Sixties Scoop, first termed by Patrick Johnston (1983), referred to policy and practices from the 1960s through the 1980s that led to the mass removal of Indigenous children from their families and communities and their gross overrepresentation in the child welfare system (Kodeeswaran et al., 2022). During this era, at least 20,000 children were forcibly taken from their families and communities to be placed in non-Indigenous foster care and adoptive homes across Canada and beyond (McKenzie et al., 2016). Provincial social workers would "scoop" up children from Indigenous communities with little pretense, reportedly under the guise of attempting to save them from poverty and poor living conditions (Johnston, 1983). The Sixties Scoop furthered Canada's assimilation strategy aimed at dismantling Indigenous culture and community.

The Loss of Culture and Community. In pursuit of forced assimilation, government officials promoted transracial adoption as beneficial. By framing it as "saving" the children from their circumstances, the government used advertisements to encourage white families to adopt Indigenous children (Paradis, 2015). As a result of Indigenous children's placement in middle class Euro-Canadian homes, the Sixties Scoop led to the loss of Indigenous culture and community (Uren, 2022). After being taken from their families, these children were isolated from their siblings and cut off from their cultural roots. For instance, many case studies have found that these children were prohibited from obtaining their birth records, were given false information about their background, such as being told they were German, and were pushed to reject their Indigenous values in favor of white societal values (Paradis, 2015; Uren, 2022).

The legacy of these assimilatory practices continues as many individuals struggle to uncover the identities of their birth parents, locate their home communities, and/or obtain status

(Palmater, 2014). These struggles reflect barriers created by the Indian Act and are exacerbated by the absence of vital birth records and the passing of older relatives (Palmater, 2014). Unlike children in residential schools, who sometimes returned home during summers and maintained some cultural ties, Sixties Scoop adoptees typically grew up isolated from Indigenous communities and without Indigenous role models (Carneiro, 2018). Many experienced discrimination and felt as though they did not belong, even when they assimilated into their adoptive families' cultures (Carneiro, 2018; Kodeeswaran et al., 2022). Furthermore, adoptive families frequently lacked the resources and/or understandings needed to support children in navigating their prejudicial treatment. Some survivors experienced "Native shame", which contributed to internalized racism (Kodeeswaran et al., 2022). Thus, the effects of the Sixties Scoop extended beyond physical displacement. Like the Indian Act and residential schools, the Sixties Scoop was another form of cultural genocide (Uren, 2022).

  Forced Patriarchy. Like previous acts of colonization, through the 60s Scoop, government officials tried to change how Indigenous families and their labour were organized to align more with the traditional European nuclear family (Carneiro, 2018). This was part of the "integration" policy after World War II (WWII; Carneiro, 2018). Unlike the Indian Act and residential schools prior to WWII, these policies were not as explicit about erasing Indigenous cultures (Carneiro, 2018). However, the policies that led to the Sixties Scoop nonetheless contributed to the loss of culture and community, forcing Indigenous peoples to adopt European ways, including patriarchal values (Arvin et al., 2013; Carneiro, 2018). In their new homes, their adoptive families often upheld traditional European family structures where fathers, seen as the "breadwinners", were at the top of the familial hierarchy (Carneiro, 2018, p.55). Carnerio notes that, within these family structures, fathers were most often seen as the primary authority figures,

and children were taught that men held ultimate power within the family. On the other hand, mothers typically managed household chores and child-rearing, modeling the expectation that women should focus on domestic duties. These environments reinforced perceptions of men's authority and the devaluation of the unpaid domestic work of women, thereby normalizing gender discrimination (Carneiro, 2018).

Social and Economic Marginalization of Indigenous Women and Girls. The Sixties Scoop furthered the social and economic marginalization of Indigenous women and girls. Socially, child welfare policies are ingrained with discrimination that devalues Indigenous cultures by disregarding Indigenous mothers and traditional knowledge about child protection (Paradis, 2015). These policies consistently favor non-Indigenous foster and adoption placements (Paradis, 2015), legitimizing their actions with the racist and sexist ideologies on which the legal system was founded. Moreover, the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system is connected to their overrepresentation in the criminal justice system, creating streamlined and ongoing displacement for Indigenous peoples (Carneiro, 2018). Many are marginalized and institutionalized.

Economically, many Indigenous children were placed in non-Indigenous foster or adoptive homes, where they were subjected to abuse and exploited for economic gain. For example, there is evidence that many foster parents took in Indigenous children to receive money from the government and to have the children perform work around the home or farm (McKenzie et al., 2016). In addition, and as discussed in detail above, the gender roles inherent in adoptive homes normalized and reinforced the exploitation of Indigenous women and girls for domestic labour (Carneiro, 2018).

Connection to the MMIWG Crisis. Similar to the Indian Act and residential schools, the Sixties Scoop significantly contributed to the MMIWG crisis by creating deep-rooted vulnerabilities for Indigenous women and girls. The forced removal of Indigenous children from their families and communities often placed them far from their home communities, both geographically and emotionally, depriving these children of protective and supportive networks. Isolated in these environments, many Indigenous children faced physical, sexual, and emotional abuse due to the racism and discrimination inherent in these adoptive families (McKenzie et al., 2016; Paradis, 2015), leading, understandably, to difficulties with self-esteem, family cohesion, and intergenerational trauma (Paradis, 2015; Uren, 2022). Many female survivors of the Sixties Scoop reported significant negative impacts on their health, including poor mental health and a lack of social connections (Kodeeswaran et al., 2022). Additionally, until 1980, social workers were not legally required to notify Indigenous band councils when children were removed. This policy created another layer of trauma, causing Indigenous families, especially mothers, to live in heightened fear and distress over the government's actions (Uren, 2022).

Resistance. Similar to the Indian Act and residential schools, Indigenous peoples have engaged in acts of resistance against the Sixties Scoop. In 1981, the alarming rate of child apprehensions and transracial adoptions in the Shushwap Band in British Columbia sparked outrage (Sinclair, 2007). Within this community, a young Indigenous leader named Wayne Christian took action, and his activism began a movement across Indigenous communities where dissatisfaction was vocalized with child welfare practices, ultimately leading to significant policy changes (Sinclair, 2007).

In the United States, Indigenous advocacy drove the enactment of the 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act, which prohibited transracial placement of Indigenous children without the consent

of their communities. Similarly, in Canada, escalating concerns about these practices resulted in

critical publications and judicial reviews that voiced Indigenous perspectives (Sinclair, 2007).

Notably, Johnston's 1983 report provided crucial statistics regarding the issues affecting

Indigenous children in the welfare system, and a 1985 judicial review in Manitoba, led by Justice

E. Kimmelman (Johnston,1983; Kimmelman, 1985). This judicial review sharply criticized child

welfare policies and the findings led Manitoba to implement a moratorium on the adoption of

Indigenous children, marking a pivotal moment in the protection of Indigenous families' rights

(Kimmelman, 1985; Sinclair, 2007).

Despite these strides, the challenges from the Sixties Scoop persist. To this day, a

disproportionately high number of Indigenous children are involved with child welfare systems

(Carneiro, 2018). According to Alberta Children's Services (2023), as of March 2023 "74% of

children and youth receiving services in care were Indigenous", a 2% increase from the year

prior (p .2). This is despite Indigenous children only making up about 10% of the child

population in Alberta (Alberta Children Services, 2023).

This overrepresentation has been described as a "humanitarian crisis" by Indigenous

Services Minister Jane Philpott (Barrera, 2017), yet Indigenous resistance continues. In the same

year as Philpott's outcry, the Canadian government was required to pay $800 million to

survivors of the Sixties Scoop after the settlement of an eight-year class-action lawsuit (Carneiro,

2018). Recent efforts to address this overrepresentation include the management of child welfare

agencies by Indigenous communities and legislative changes (Carneiro, 2018). However, these

Indigenous-managed agencies continue to face numerous challenges, including dealing with the

intergenerational impacts of colonization, navigating complex legislative frameworks, and

coping with the chronic underfunding of child welfare services (Sinha & Kozlowski, 2013).

National Inquiry

Indigenous women and girls have been speaking out about gendered violence for decades, and in 2004, the Sisters in Spirit (SIS) initiative was launched by the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) to raise awareness and document cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women (FAFIA & NWAC, 2016). Despite the severity of the situation, investigation efforts by the government were insufficient, and reports made by the media, police, and government were scarce (FAFIA & NWAC, 2016). In 2015, after a change in a resistant previous government, the new federal government responded to pressures from survivors, family members, and various organizations with the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (FAFIA & NWAC, 2016; National Inquiry, 2019). The National Inquiry (2019) focused on racialized and sexualized violence against Indigenous women and girls and was a massive undertaking, involving 2,380 individuals who took part in a truth gathering process.

Four years later, the National Inquiry released The Final Report, Reclaiming Power and Place (2019). It was concluded that Indigenous women and girls experience higher rates of violence, death, and suicide than those who are non-Indigenous, which is a direct cause of colonial structures (e.g., Indian Act, Residential Schools, the Sixties Scoop, breaches of human and Indigenous rights) (National Inquiry, 2019). Ultimately, The Final Report represents a significant milestone in the MMIWG movement.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Movement

While Indigenous resistance and the MMIWG crisis is not a recent development, the MMIWG movement is (Hansen & Dim, 2019). Advocates in this movement aim to increase recognition of the disproportionate number of MMIWG, bring attention to the normalization of

systemic racism, and help people to understand the ways oppression intersects with sexism in the lives of Indigenous women and girls (Hansen & Dim, 2019). In addition, MMIWG advocates call for the end of gendered violence against Indigenous peoples (Hansen & Dim, 2019).

Two dates are important for the MMIWG movement: February 14th and May 5th (Native Hope, n.d.). On February 14th the MMIW National Day of Action and Awareness is held (Native Hope, n.d.). Although Vancouver holds the largest march, Women's Memorial Marches take place all around the country (Native Hope, n.d.). In addition, activists protest racism, inequality, and violence that disproportionately impact the lives of Indigenous women and girls (Native Hope, n.d.).

May 5th is the official National Day of Awareness for MMIWG (Native Hope, n.d.). This date is more widely celebrated in Canada and the United States, compared to the date in February (Native Hope, n.d.). On May 5th, many activities take place to raise awareness for the MMIWG crisis and fight against continued injustices (Native Hope, n.d.). Some activities include marches, protests, bike rides, fundraisers, and art exhibits (Native Hope, n.d.).

Since its commencement, the MMIWG movement has gained momentum due to enduring efforts made by Indigenous women and their families (Native Hope, n.d.). These efforts led to growth of the movement (Native Hope, n.d.). A red hand over the mouth has become a symbol for the growing MMIWG movement (Native Hope, n.d.). This symbol represents "all the missing sisters whose voices are not heard", "the silence of the media and law enforcement in the midst of this crisis", and "the oppression and subjugation of [Indigenous] women who are now rising up to say #NoMoreStolenSisters" (Native Hope, n.d., para. 3). Importantly, the term "missing" extends beyond the simple notion of an unknown whereabouts or "runaway cases" of women and girls who may soon return home. Instead, the term more broadly encompasses the

tragic reality where many women and girls are kidnapped, are victims of violence, and/or are murdered although they or their bodies have not yet been found. Every count of a "missing" person signifies the unresolved grief that families and communities carry along with their hope for justice and closure.

Forms of MMIWG Activism

Many forms of activism have fueled the MMIWG movement, including art, social media, and marches (Gallagher, 2020; Parsloe & Campbell, 2021; Rose, 2020). Through the following sections of this paper, I will review some forms of MMIWG activism and the impact they have had.

Art Activism. Indigenous art activism has played an important role in bringing together Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities to raise awareness of the MMIWG crisis in Canada, and facilitating healing for Indigenous peoples who are affected by the MMIWG crisis (Gallagher, 2020). Two significant art projects in the MMIWG movement include the Walking With Our Sisters art installation and The REDress Project, both of which raised awareness of the injustice and trauma communities experienced due to their loved ones being missing or murdered.

Walking With Our Sisters is an art installation created by Métis artist and activist Christi Belcourt, consisting of over 2,000 beaded moccasin vamps, or the beaded top halves of moccasins (Anderson, 2016; Gallagher, 2020). All unfinished moccasins are displayed in a pathway to represent the unfinished lives of missing and murdered Indigenous women, children, and Two-Spirited people. The exhibit is crowd sourced, and thousands of people contributed to the artwork, fundraising, and booking of the exhibit tour. This collective effort reflects how people can unite through art to make a difference (Walking With Our Sisters, 2016).

The REDress Project is another art installation created by Métis artist Jaime Black, consisting of hundreds of red dresses that are installed in public spaces across North America. The red dresses symbolize the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls who are no longer with us (Gallagher, 2020). The choice of red is also symbolic because according to some Indigenous teachings, spirits can only see the colour red (Allaire, 2021). Activists in the MMIWG movement often wear red, so missing and murdered loved ones can find their way home (Allaire, 2021).

Both the Walking With Our Sisters and The REDress Project had significant impacts on Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Gallagher (2020) conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 individuals (six Indigenous and two non-Indigenous) who participated in the Walking With Our Sisters or The REDress Project. Through these interviews, individuals shared the positive impacts of the Walking With Our Sisters installation and The REDress Project. Namely, they unified Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities by strengthening bonds and communication, increased awareness and educated others on the MMIWG crisis, and facilitated healing among families of MMIWG and their communities.

Social Media. Social media also plays a critical role in Indigenous activism (Parsloe & Campbell, 2021). Given the number of people who use social platforms, social media can have a significant impact on collective action. For example, social media can facilitate the spread of information not available via traditional media channels, coordinate and organize forms of political action, and foster discussion by connecting like-minded people (Valenzuela, 2013).

Regarding the MMIWG crisis, hashtags were used to connect and increase activist initiatives. For example, #MMIWG increased transparency and knowledge mobilization by disseminating news of protests, ceremonies, exhibits, artwork, and new cases of MMIWG

(Parsloe & Campbell, 2021). In addition, social media provides a platform for communities to connect, and community connections can positively impact individuals' sense of identity (Parsloe & Campbell, 2021). These impacts are particularly beneficial, as many Indigenous persons may struggle with their sense of identity due to colonization (Gallagher, 2020).

Parsloe and Campbell (2021) explored how individuals who engaged in MMIW cyber-activism can develop a collective Indigenous identity. They thematically analyzed 481 Twitter tweets and found that participants who used the MMIW hashtag framed Indigenous trauma as (a) personal and pervasive, (b) systemic and structural, and (c) continued injustice. The authors noted that this way of framing Indigenous trauma uses a nation-building lens, emphasizing individuals' community membership and agency to actively make change (Parsloe & Campbell, 2021). In contrast, a therapeutic lens of trauma emphasizes an individual's suffering rather than viewing trauma as a systemic issue (Parsloe & Campbell, 2021). This research suggests that using social media for Indigenous activism can cultivate a collective Indigenous identity, highlighting the potential for social media to shift the emphasis from individual suffering to collective experiences of trauma, which could be healing and empowering.

MMIWG March. Marches play an important role in Indigenous activism. The 1991 Women's Memorial March held in Vancouver was the first record of organized activism involving the MMIWG crisis (Rose, 2020). Since then, marches have been held every year, expanding across Canada, to honour the lives of MMIWG. Although March procedures vary from place to place, the public will often gather before the March starts. Some people will carry banners with the names and photos of their loved ones, and others will chant "No more stolen sisters!" Smudging and drumming take place throughout the event. After the March is over, family members tell stories, make speeches, and share food (Menke, 2019). Connecting through

food and storytelling can help individuals heal from grief and pain (FAFIA & NWAC, 2016). Furthermore, the Marches bring attention to systemic issues impacting Indigenous women and girls, prevent future gendered violence, and increase community building and healing (Hansen & Dim, 2019; Parsloe & Campbell, 2021).

MMIWG March in Edmonton Alberta. In Edmonton, Alberta, the MMIWG March occurs annually from 8am to 4pm on May 5th - National Red Dress Day (City of Edmonton, n.d.). This important event is organized by the Bear Clan Patrol Beaver Hills House (n.d.), an Indigenous-led volunteer group founded in 2018 by Judith Gale. The day begins with a pipe ceremony at Beaver Hills House Park. By 11 am, participants gather at Sir Winston Churchill Square, wearing red and holding posters and signs. Around noon, the March begins with everyone making their way down Jasper Avenue, a main street in downtown Edmonton. This March is characterized by a vibrant display of communal solidarity, including red smoke filling the air, chants echoing down the streets, and the rhythmic beating of drums accompanied by singing and dancing. Upon returning to Beaver Hills House Park, the atmosphere shifts to one of community engagement. People hang red dresses from trees and stake signs into the ground, creating a visual memorial. The park serves as a gathering place, where participants receive free refreshments and engage with Indigenous vendors, some who sell MMIWG-themed merchandise. The event also includes prayers and land acknowledgments led by an Elder, and recently, a statement acknowledging the ongoing genocide in Palestine. A meal provided by We Together Strong, a group of postal workers, is followed by a sharing and caring session where individuals share stories and honour their loved ones with musical performances. Throughout the event, smudging ceremonies and the distribution of gifts to those who share their stories enhance the healing experience.

Gap in Literature

Despite the MMIWG movement gaining momentum recently, little empirical research exists on the effects of engaging in the MMIWG March, particularly from the perspectives of Indigenous youth. Indigenous youth have been excluded from the very narrative that defines them (Crooks, 2010). The public is bombarded by negative statistics about Indigenous youth, involving violence, drugs, and suicide (Crooks, 2010; Okpalauwaekwe et al., 2022; Lopez-Carmen et al., 2019). These negative statistics are often presented in isolation, without adequate contextualization within Canada's history of colonization, and the subsequent effects of intergenerational trauma and ongoing systemic racism (Crooks, 2010). This deficit-based narrative is partly due to researchers using Indigenous youth as passive subjects rather than active agents of change (Crooks, 2010). Through this research, I address this gap by actively engaging Indigenous youth and their communities throughout the research process to provide these youth with a platform to voice their perspectives. My goal was to understand the impacts of engaging in the MMIWG March and youths' perspectives on what actions can be done in response to the MMIWG crisis. Learning from and with Indigenous youth in this way shifts away from a deficit focus to empowerment through storytelling filled with strengths and resilience.

Chapter 3: Methods

The following section outlines the methods used in my research, including a transformative worldview, community-based participatory research (CBPR), qualitative description, and Indigenous methodologies (IM) (see Table 1). I will further explain how these approaches informed my study. This chapter will also detail the data collection and analysis processes, my collaboration with Inner City High School, and how participant engagement and ethical considerations were maintained throughout the study.

Table 1

Summary of Methodological Approaches Used in the Study

Methodological Construct	My Methodological Approach
Worldview/Research Paradigm	Transformative Worldview.
Research Approach	CBPR & IM
Method	Qualitative Description
Data Collection Strategy	Group Discussion
Data Analysis Strategy	Thematic Analysis

Transformative Worldview

A transformative worldview informed my qualitative research. Operating from a transformative worldview requires researchers to confront social oppression by (1) investigating social oppression and (2) integrating knowledge with political change (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Transformative worldview research should include an action agenda and researchers must focus on important social issues such as empowerment, inequality, and oppression (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This is exactly what I aimed to do in this research by investigating the impact of

the MMIWG March on Indigenous youth, while also examining their beliefs about the actions that should be taken in response to the crisis.

In addition, the research process should be collaborative to avoid further marginalization of participants, meaning participants should be involved in the research design, data collection, analysis, and should benefit from the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The goal in transformative research is to promote and unite marginalized voices to enact reform and change (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The transformative worldview is aligned with my purpose in this research, to come together with youth to learn from their experiences and their perspectives on required responsive action to the issues that impact them, while also challenging deficit-based narratives.

Community-Based Participatory Approach

The proposed research aligned with a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach, where community members are equitable partners throughout the research process (Hacker, 2013). In CBPR, community members have shared responsibility in decision-making and the research findings benefit both the community and the researchers (Hacker, 2013).

Israel (2012; pp. 8-11) formulated nine guiding principles of CBPR derived from a thorough literature review. These principles include (a) acknowledging "community as a unit of identity", (b) building "on strengths and resources within the community," (c) facilitating "a collaborative and equitable partnership at all stages of the research, involving an empowering and power sharing process that attends to social inequalities," (d) fostering "co-learning and capacity building among all partners", (e) integrating and achieving "a balance between knowledge generation and intervention for the mutual benefit of all partners," (f) focusing "on the local relevance of public health problems and on ecological perspectives that attend to the

multiple determinants of health," (g) involving "systems development using a cyclical and iterative process," (h) disseminating "results to all partners and involves them in the wider dissemination of results," and (i) involving "a long-term process and commitment to sustainability." These principles are not meant to apply universally to all partnerships. Instead, they serve as a flexible approach, where principles are co-selected and adapted to meet the specific needs and context of each partnership. This allows for endless ways to conduct CBPR research, while still upholding the core values of equity and power sharing.

Relationship and reciprocity are key elements of CBPR, both fundamental values in Indigenous cultures (Hunt & Young, 2021). Reciprocity in relationships between the researcher and their Indigenous partners is essential, so all parties can communicate their needs in order for mutual benefit to result (Hunt & Young, 2021). Reciprocity is vital, as researchers and the knowledge they have shared have perpetuated negative stereotypes, racism, and genocide against Indigenous communities (Narasimhan et al., 2013; Rutecki et al., 2011).

By following relational CBPR practices, researchers can ensure steps are taken to engage in strengths and resiliency focused work (Hunt & Young, 2021). To shift away from the dominant deficit narrative, many CBPR researchers have adopted a strength-based approach by focusing on Indigenous resiliency and how Indigenous peoples are able to resist, adapt, and thrive when faced with hardships (Njeze et al., 2020). Aligned with a strength-based CBPR approach, in this study I focused on how Indigenous youth can adapt and thrive in the face of adversity and trauma.

Given the importance of continued partnership during and after the research project in CBPR, it makes sense that my relationship with Inner City High School (ICHS) over the past four years has been both enduring and evolving. I initially joined the ICHS community in 2020

as a psychological assistant, a role I held for two years. Although my formal role within the school has since transitioned into a research partnership, I still feel deeply connected to the ICHS community. This connection has been nurtured through ongoing communication, participation in important community events, greeting past students when appropriate, and engaging in difficult conversations, all of which has allowed our relationship to grow and strengthen over time. In addition, this partnership has been mutually beneficial, as we have worked together toward the shared goal of supporting the school's students and staff in meaningful ways and the broader community goal of systemic change, particularly in relation to MMIWG.

Moving forward, I am committed to working alongside ICHS to ensure that the findings from this research are not only shared but are also translated into practical, impactful outcomes. This does not mean simply sending them a copy of the thesis, burdening ICHS with the responsibility of deciphering the academic content. Instead, it means collaborating with ICHS, engaging in dialogue to ask questions and offer suggestions, and, importantly, translating the research findings into a meaningful format that directly addresses their specific needs. This could involve providing tailored presentations to the school community or creating materials that are relevant and accessible to the students, staff, and school board. My aim is to ensure that the findings of this research further validate the important work being done at ICHS and empower the community to continue their efforts. Although my master's degree has been completed and the thesis technically concluded, my commitment to ICHS and this project is ongoing.

Qualitative Description

Qualitative research approaches can help researchers to highlight participants' perspectives, experiences, and associated contexts (Fossey et al., 2002). Qualitative researchers answer research questions inductively, by first understanding the experiences and associated

meaning of participants' words and then developing overall themes, with a focus both on individual meanings and capturing the complexity of a given situation (Fossey et al., 2002). In this research, I seek to understand Indigenous youths' perspectives of their engagement in the MMIWG March. A qualitative approach was ideal in my research so that youths could share their experiences and social worlds authentically and in depth (Fossey et al., 2002)

Qualitative research methods encompass various design frameworks, each having specific goals and philosophical views - and qualitative description stands distinct in its approach (Magilvy & Thomas, 2009; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative description is a qualitative method particularly suited for capturing straightforward, detailed accounts of experiences or events as they are perceived by participants (Magilvy & Thomas, 2009). Sandelowski (2000) noted that this method allows researchers to provide a "comprehensive summary of an event in the "everyday terms" of those experiencing them" (p.336), making it ideal for studies that seek to highlight participants' narratives. In addition, qualitative descriptive research can lead to valuable insights that can inform the development of new interventions (Magilvy & Thomas, 2009). Through this approach, participants' discourse is described in detail, deepening understandings of individual experiences and situating them within their sociocultural contexts (Magilvy & Thomas, 2009). Given these considerations, I decided that a qualitative descriptive approach was particularly suitable for this study, in which I sought to understand the effects of the MMIWG March on Indigenous youth, and their thoughts about responsive action moving forward.

Indigenous Methodologies

In this thesis, I have chosen to use the term Indigenous methodologies (IM) in the plural form to reflect and acknowledge the multiplicity of research practices required to respect the

unique and diverse cultures of different Indigenous communities. IM is not a one size fits all approach; it represents various frameworks rooted in the distinct worldviews of Indigenous communities and stand in contrast to many Western research paradigms (Williams & Shipley, 2023). These methodologies lead to research that is "by, with, and for Indigenous peoples" (Williams & Shipley, 2023, p.467), allowing researchers to utilize techniques and methods that arise from Indigenous traditions and knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). When engaging in IM, researchers prioritize community and cultural protocols, values, and needs, viewing them as central to the research process (Williams & Shipley, 2023). Further emphasizing this core intent, IM focus on principles such as respect, reciprocity, relevance, and responsibility (Wilson, 2020; Williams & Shipley, 2023). These principles extend to encompass resistance, resilience, resurgence, restoration, and repatriation, indicating a broad commitment to both community engagement and the restoration of Indigenous rights and culture through research (Williams & Shipley, 2023).

Guided Rather than Grounded

In this research, I was guided by IM but did not fully employ these methodologies. A full implementation of IM was constrained by the limitations of conducting a thesis within a colonial institution like the University of Alberta (for more information see "Unlearning Colonial Research Values", p.17; "Limitations", p.128). Therefore, it is important to humbly acknowledge it was not possible to retain all aspects of IM that I would have liked to. Moreover, despite being Indigenous, my connection to my identity has been disrupted by external forces, such as the impact colonization had on my family and the colonial education systems that have significantly influenced my worldview. This insider-outsider dynamic introduces additional complexities to employing IM fully.

Williams and Shipley (2023) discuss the debate surrounding who should employ IM. Some argue that only Indigenous researchers should use IM, some say that being Indigenous is not enough and that Indigenous researchers must also be part of the community, and others recognize the practical need for broader involvement. Furthermore, a deep understanding of Indigenous worldviews, often tied to language and cultural practices, is essential for employing IM effectively. This level of immersion is not accessible to all researchers, including those who, like myself, feel disconnected from their Indigenous roots due to personal circumstances. As such, while my research process is guided by IM, it does not fully employ them. My academic training and personal experiences have inevitably shaped my approach, leading me to incorporate principles of IM (e.g., relationality, respect, reciprocity), but not to the extent that someone with a deeper cultural connection might. Spiritual and cultural aspects were particularly challenging to embrace more fully. Moreover, my Western academic training, which has influenced my knowledge and even language, made it difficult to navigate the full application of IM.

Community-Centered

The concept of being community-centered is crucial in IMs, given the emphasis on research not only involving the community but also being guided by its interests and needs throughout the process. According to Williams and Shipley (2023), communities should have significant control over all phases of research, from conceptualization to implementation and reporting. This approach enhances the possibility that research can make a meaningful difference in the lives of community members, integrated into the entire research process rather than as a separate step.

Although ICHS and the Indigenous youth did not have significant control in all phases of my research, I embraced a community-centered approach with ICHS. The engagement with the community started early in the research process. Before initiating the study, I collaborated with the staff at ICHS to shape and modify the research questions. This step was crucial, as it not only demonstrated reciprocity but also ensured that the research addressed the specific needs and concerns of the ICHS community. In addition, both staff and Indigenous youth at ICHS were actively involved throughout the study. Staff members played a central role in data collection, specifically by facilitating group discussions. In addition, students were given the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the preliminary findings.

Important Aspects of IM

Addressing Issues and Creating Change. Addressing issues and creating change are fundamental aspects of IM. Researchers must not only identify but also address the pressing concerns of Indigenous communities. As Williams and Shipley (2023) note, research should ideally help inform policy-makers by highlighting problems and proposing potential solutions. Additionally, Indigenous research should be both personal and political, actively contributing to systemic change (Absolon, 2011; Williams & Shipley, 2023).

I embraced these principles by adopting a transformative worldview through which I sought to create social and political change. In this research, I address a current and significant systemic issue affecting Indigenous peoples in Canada, making this research timely and politically relevant. In alignment with IMs, I aim to ensure that the research goes beyond academic inquiry to actively engage in address real-world problem of the MMIWG crisis. One of my main research goals was to understand from youths' perspectives what needs to be done in response to the MMIWG crisis affecting Indigenous communities. With the knowledge from this

research, I intend to facilitate systemic change by providing actionable insights, with implications for policy changes. This approach reflects a commitment to creating change through research, aligning with IM.

Differential Methods. The methods and data collection of IM often significantly contrast Western research approaches. Williams and Shiply (2023) highlight that IM employ various data collection methods that might seem unfamiliar to Western researchers. For instance, instead of the typical one-on-one interviews where the power dynamic favors the interviewer, IM might utilize formats like talking circles, which emphasize equality and encourage participation.

In my thesis, I integrated culturally grounded methods by opting for a qualitative research design that combined focus groups with sharing circles. This approach was chosen specifically to align with IM, facilitating a more equal and reciprocal exchange of information. This setup not only allowed for the co-creation of rich data and knowledge but also honoured the cultural practices and communication styles of the participants. Additionally, to further respect and incorporate Indigenous cultural norms and practices into the research process, I offered traditional elements, such as medicine and culturally significant foods, with the support from community members. More specifically, smudge was available for everyone after the discussion concluded, with many students taking part. In addition, Bannock (prepared by a hired local Indigenous community member), chips, and pop were provided halfway through discussion. These practices were discussed in advance with community members, with the purpose of making students feel more comfortable and respected, as well as enriching the research environment by grounding the discussion in a culturally relevant context.

Relationality. Relationality—encompassing respect, reciprocity, and accountability—is important for IM (Williams & Shipley, 2023). This approach emphasizes building and

maintaining relationships based on mutual trust and respect, recognizing that knowledge is created within the context of these relationships (Kovach, 2009; Williams & Shipley, 2023). According to Kovach (2009), good research requires nurturing strong relationships with community members and respecting Indigenous rights through appropriate permissions and protections.

Respect in my study was demonstrated through my established relationships with ICHS, where I had fostered a connection for around three years before the study commenced. Participating in events like the March with students and staff deepened my understanding and respect for the community's experiences and knowledge. Additionally, I consciously decided against reducing profound ceremonial experiences to text within my thesis, after experiencing and reflecting on their sacred nature, and after discussions with a community member and my supervisor (see "Confronting My Own Assumptions", p. 14).

Reciprocity was addressed by ensuring that the research findings were not only accessible but also returned to the community in meaningful ways. I planned to democratize knowledge by presenting the findings at ICHS to students, staff, and the school board, and sharing results with local Indigenous media and the Bear Clan, the group that organizes the MMIWG March in Edmonton. By sharing widely, I hoped to increase the probability that this research was directly accessible to those it was meant to benefit (Chilisa, 2020).

Accountability in research involves answering to all community relations and considering the broader impact of the research on current and future generations (Williams & Shipley, 2023). This was practiced in my study by involving students in reviewing and modifying preliminary results, with a focus on framing the research questions around potential actions that can be taken in response to the MMIWG crisis. The approach not only addresses current concerns but has

significant implications for future generations, guiding the research towards long-term, sustainable change. While this research primarily engaged the specific ICHS community members, there are plans to share the findings with broader Indigenous communities in the future. These practices uphold the relational accountability required by IM, reflecting a commitment to ongoing community engagement.

Research Champion: Charis Auger

A central figure in this research was Charis Auger, a dedicated staff member at Inner City High School (ICHS), who served as the research champion for this study. Charis was deeply involved in several critical aspects of the research process, including participant recruitment, data collection sessions, participant engagement, and the sense-making session. Her active participation ensured that the study remained culturally sensitive and closely connected to the ICHS community. Throughout the research, Charis and I held regular meetings to discuss the study's progress, address any emerging challenges, and ensure that the research process aligned with the cultural values and needs of the participants. These meetings were pivotal in maintaining the study's focus on community engagement and participant well-being, allowing for continuous reflection and adaptation as the research unfolded. In recognition of her extensive contributions, I will refer to Charis Auger as the "research champion" throughout the remainder of this thesis.

Participants and Recruitment

Participants consisted of Indigenous students who were attending ICHS, in Edmonton, Alberta. Recruitment was completed at ICHS. In particular, the research champion identified students who met the inclusion criteria: students who (a) were 16 years and older, (b) identified as Indigenous, and (c) attended the Edmonton MMIWG March in 2023. While detailed

demographic information, such as age or gender identity, was not systematically collected, this decision was intentional to preserve the relational nature of the research process. The focus was on understanding the experiences of students as a collective group rather than drawing conclusions based on demographic distinctions. This approach was also aligned with the research's qualitative nature, where the aim was not generalizability but rather to provide rich, contextually grounded insights into the youths' experiences.

The research champion who had been involved in the research project from the beginning, was provided with a recruitment sheet containing study information that was shared with students. After the March, I contacted the research champion to schedule a group discussion with the students. A snowball sampling strategy was used in the proposed research (Fossey et al., 2002). This sampling strategy involved the research champion identifying ICHS students who met the inclusion criteria and could participate in the study. Snowball sampling was an ideal strategy for accessing Indigenous youth who engaged in the MMIWG March because my pre-existing relationships with staff and students from ICHS improved my ability to reach members of this Indigenous community. In addition, snowball sampling can facilitate trust by providing participants a sense of familiarity and comfort, as they are likely to know the researcher and other participants.

Eight students took part in the current study, which allowed the co-creation of in-depth data involving participant experiences. All participants received a ten-dollar gift card to either Tim Hortons or Walmart for agreeing to participate in the study.

Participants for this study were specifically recruited based on their attendance at the 2023 MMIWG march organized in Edmonton. Although the primary focus of our discussions was on experiences and reflections directly related to the 2023 March, some participants had

attended previous MMIWG Marches. As such, these individuals may have referenced their cumulative experiences during our discussions. Rather than detracting from our discussion, it is likely that this blend of insights provided a deeper, more contextual understanding of the Marches' impacts on Indigenous youth.

Data Collection Procedures

Western research methods have generally failed to meet the needs of Indigenous peoples because such methods fail to incorporate Indigenous worldviews and values (Hunt & Young, 2021). In contrast, blending of Indigenous sharing circles and Western focus groups can be a culturally safe and appropriate approach to engage in research with Indigenous peoples (Hunt & Young, 2021). This combination satisfies both Indigenous and Western ideologies, where Indigenous cultures and traditions are honoured and Western views of legitimate research are appeased (Hunt & Young, 2021). There is growing research on the blending of sharing circles and focus groups; however, there is no one size fits all approach (Hunt & Young, 2021). Main components that can be modified to either fit a sharing circle or focus group method, include recruitment method, location of discussion, identity of facilitator, length of session, question format, and reimbursement (see Table 2) (Hunt & Young, 2021). In a combination approach, researchers have flexibility to choose the exact variation or degree to which they blend these two methods (Hunt & Young, 2021).

In this study, I used a blend of an Indigenous sharing circle and Western focus group to guide discussions which were held in a classroom at ICHS. A predetermined list of questions and prompts were created to guide the research champion (Fossey et al., 2002). The list supported the research champion by providing structure while still allowing for flexibility. I created this list

with the support of the research champion to ensure the questions were age-appropriate and sensitive to the perspectives and experiences of Indigenous youth (Fossey et al., 2002).

Before the discussion began, the research champion introduced me to the group, and I explained the study's purpose and my role as the researcher. By having the research champion start the session and handle my introduction, we aimed to create a space that was conducive to open and authentic dialogue. After this introduction, the semi-structured group discussion was intially facilitated by the research champion, who had a strong relationship with the youth due to their role as a teacher and their involvement in the MMIWG March. While I knew some of the students due to my previous work at ICHS, some of the faces were new. The decision to structure the discussion this way was driven by the desire to foster a safe and collaborative environment where participants felt comfortable sharing. Following the research champion's facilitation, I guided the discussion further. While the discussion was structured to begin with the research champion, our roles often intertwined as the conversation naturally evolved, with both of us posing additional questions or prompts. This approach was intended to create a conversational flow that encouraged knowledge sharing in a natural and passionate manner, rather than a rigid question-and-answer format that often feels sterile and uncomfortable. Youth also had the option to supplement group discussion with written responses and submit responses to the predetermined list of questions and the discussions. This was done to give all youth an opportunity to share their perspectives and experiences in their preferred modality.

The group discussion lasted around 60 minutes. A small break was taken halfway through the group discussion, during which food (i.e., chips, pop, bannock hot dogs) was available to the youth. At the end of the group discussion, the research champion invited the students to smudge. Overall, the presence of the staff member and cultural supports aimed to help students felt safe

and supported throughout the discussion. The group discussion was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

My active involvement with ICHS staff and students was demonstrated through participation in the MMIWG March, ongoing collaboration throughout the research process, and continued involvement beyond my master's degree. Regular collaborations included formal meetings, frequent email exchanges to share updates on the project, and the dissemination of preliminary findings for feedback. The research champion and youth who took park in the discussion were also engaged in data analysis through a sense making session, explored below, to better ensure their perspectives were integrated. Additionally, debriefing and reflective meetings with the research champion contributed to the study's depth. The culmination of this collaborative effort was a comprehensive presentation to the ICHS, highlighting the participatory research process and findings. After the knowledge was shared, the transcript and written responses were collectively analyzed using thematic analysis.

Table 2

Comparing Sharing Circles, Focus Groups, and Combined Approach Used

Characteristic	Type of Method		
Name	Indigenous Sharing Circles	Western Focus Groups	Combined Approach Used
Recruitment	Word of mouth.	Advertising.	Word of mouth.
Location	Culturally relevance.	Central, convenient.	Central, convenient.
Facilitator	Community member starts with a ceremony or prayer.	Researcher starts with an icebreaker.	Community member started with an introduction & ended

			with an invitation to smudge.
Length	3 to 8 hours (or until enlightenment is achieved).	Up to 2 hours.	60 mins.
Question Format	Oral history or open-ended questions, possible artifact.	Predetermined questions, semi-structured.	Predetermined questions, semi-structured.
Compensation	Food, beverage, or cultural gift (after sharing circles start).	Food, beverage, or monetary reward (after focus group concludes).	Cultural and other food and beverage offered after discussion starts. Gift card given after discussion ends.

Note. This table shows the differences between Indigenous sharing circles and Western focus groups. When blending these two methods, a researcher may include any method combination. The far-right column was the approach used for this thesis. Information was summarized from a study conducted by Hunt and Young (2021).

Data Analysis

Using accurate and transparent data analysis methods is an element of research rigour (Fossey et al., 2002). I used thematic analysis, which involves identifying important or interesting patterns in the data (Maguire & Delahunt 2017). Here data is organized, coded, and translated into themes (Maguire & Delahunt 2017). Maguire and Delahunt (2017) created a step-

by-step guide for scholars and learners who are performing a thematic analysis. This step-by-step

guide was used to support the data analysis process.

As guided by Maguire and Delahunt's (2017) process, at the beginning of the data

analysis, I, *gained familiarity with the data* (i.e., step 1) by rereading the transcript multiple times

and writing down early thoughts.

Using Microsoft Excel, I then inductively *identified underlying patterns and codes* (i.e.,

step 2), by taking relevant segments of the data and organizing the segments into groups. I also

used open coding, meaning codes were not pre-determined and instead were created and

modified throughout the process.

Next, I *searched for themes* (i.e., step 3) by organizing codes into broader categories.

During this process, I explored different connections between codes by rearranging codes in

Excel to develop preliminary themes.

After preliminary themes were created, I *reviewed the themes* further (i.e., step 4). While

reviewing the themes, I used color coding and asked questions to facilitate modification and

development. For example, "There is a lot of overlap between two themes. Could these two

themes be the same?"

Finally, I *defined the themes* (i.e., step 5). By reflecting on the research question, I was

able to determine how themes related to one another and answer the research question by

illustrating the relationships. I also created a final thematic map, using Inspiration 10, to illustrate

the relationships.

Even though I followed a step-by-step procedure while completing the thematic analysis,

the process was not linear. Instead, the process was more iterative. I would often bounce forward

and backward between steps and sometimes work on multiple steps simultaneously. For instance,

while searching for themes (step 3), I often found it necessary to return to the earlier coding phase (step 2) to adjust codes or create new ones as patterns became clearer. Similarly, during the theme review (step 4), I engaged in ongoing reflection and rearrangement, sometimes even revisiting the raw data to ensure that the themes accurately captured the underlying patterns. This iterative process involved working on multiple steps simultaneously, such as refining codes while also defining themes.

Participant Engagement

As part of participant engagement, we (i.e., myself and the research champion) conducted a final participant meeting termed the "Sense-Making Session." This session was designed to engage participants in a review and validation process of the preliminary findings derived from the earlier group discussion (see Table 3). The aim of this session was to provide participants with the opportunity to confirm, refute, or suggest modifications to the research interpretations, ensuring the results represented their perspectives and experiences.

The session included two participants from the study, the research champion who had facilitated the group discussion, and me. The research champion informed students who participated in the research about the upcoming sense-making session, inviting them to join. Following this invitation, two students expressed interest in taking part, and a mutually agreed-upon time and date was set for the meeting. This smaller group, while not including all participants, allowed for a more intimate and focused discussion. This mix of students and research champion aided in fostering a collaborative atmosphere. To further collaborate, I employed an interactive and visual/illustrative method. I prepared a poster equipped with double-sided foam tape on the front, which allowed me to easily stick and adjust the pre-cut cards — detailing the research question, themes, codes, and example quotes — throughout the session.

This setup allowed for the preliminary results to be modified and rearranged based on participant feedback.

I then introduced each theme and code one-by-one. For each, I explained the main ideas and shared example quotes that highlighted the codes. Afterwards, I stuck these elements to the poster (with the research questions being in the center of the poster), and I asked for feedback from the participants. This feedback involved confirmations and modifications. Each piece of feedback was discussed collectively, and adjustments were made in real-time, with changes and additions being reflected directly on the poster.
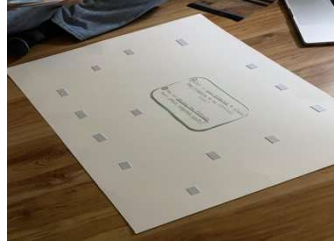
As for the confirmations, the participants confirmed all themes and codes were appropriate. However, one participant felt that something was missing – the concept of "society". In response, I wrote "society" on a pre-cut card, and we engaged in a discussion about what "society" meant to them, what they felt was missing, and how it related to existing themes and codes. I then asked the participants where "society" fit in the map, and a participant suggested placing it near "historical and ongoing trauma." This led to a deeper conversation about how "society" intersects with "historical and ongoing trauma" and "systemic racism" and whether it should be an overarching theme or subcategorized under another theme as a code. The participants ultimately decided that "society" should be included under "historical and ongoing trauma." This modification led me to revisiting the transcript and organizing relevant segments to the code "society."

As may be evident, this process helped the session be both interactive and responsive to the participants' perspectives. By the end of the session, the poster had evolved into a comprehensive diagram reflecting a collective understanding of the themes and subthemes, enriched by the participants' direct input. This visual artifact not only symbolized the

collaborative effort of the research and participant engagement but also served as a tangible

validation of the research findings. The sense-making session proved to be an effective method

for ensuring that the research outcomes were a true reflection of the participants' experiences and

insights.

Table 3

Photos of the Sense Making Session

Brief Description	Photo
Session setup and introduction.	
Presentation of research question, themes, codes, and quotes.	
Participants providing feedback and confirming findings.	
Participants providing feedback, leading to the modification and the inclusion of "society"	

Note. The four photos illustrate different parts of the sense-making session with participants. Each photo represents a part of the collaborative process.

Credibility, Authenticity, Criticality, and Integrity

Whittemore and Mandle (2001) have outlined primary concepts necessary to ensure the rigour of qualitative research, namely credibility, authenticity, criticality, and integrity. In the following paragraphs, I will review each of these concepts and explore how these concepts were applied in the study. In addition, I will use the word "we" to refer to myself and the research champion who facilitated the group discussion and participant engagement.

Credibility indicates that the researcher has taken the necessary steps and is confident that their interpretations of the data are accurate. Additionally, the researcher strives to go beyond their subjective experience. In other words, the findings represent the experiences of the participants. In the current study, credibility was achieved through participant engagement and prolonged engagement. Through participant engagement, I actively involved participants in verifying the accuracy of the results. Prolonged engagement allowed me the opportunity to immerse myself within the ICHS community, deepening my understanding of the culture. For example, I had attended the MMIWG March with the school for three years straight. This extended interaction allowed for a more nuanced interpretation, further situated in the context of the perspectives on Indigenous youth on the MMIWG crisis and the profound effect of the March on their lives. Both participant engagement and prolonged engagement were effective tools of credibility and helped me accurately reflect the experiences of the participants.

Authenticity, resembling credibility, ensures the research genuinely reflects the perspectives and experiences of the participants. Moreover, authenticity requires the research to remain authentic to the phenomenon, while respecting the participants and their multiple

perspectives. It is essential for the researcher to detect the subtle differences in participant perspectives and be aware of how their presence influences the participants' ability to share authentically. In addition, authenticity is especially important when research involves Indigenous peoples, as past research has perpetuated negative stereotypes about Indigenous peoples (Njeze et al., 2020). In the current study, we achieved authenticity through several means. First, we fostered a safe space for participants to be vulnerable. A safe space was achieved by inviting a community member to facilitate discussion, offering access to Indigenous medicine, serving food and snacks during the group discussion, and starting the group discussion with an intention and a reminder about respect and confidentiality. Mindful of how my own presence could stifle voices, I wanted to make sure participants felt comfortable, valued, and respected. I hoped that all these small actions could have a summative effect, creating a safe place for participants to be vulnerable and share authentically. Secondly, we honoured participants' preference for communication, allowing them to contribute to the discussion verbally or in writing. Recognizing diversity in how participants prefer to share, we did not want the method of study, involving a group discussion, to affect whose voices were captured. By offering multiple avenues for expression, we sought to reflect each participant's unique perspective and capture the subtle difference among them.

Criticality refers to being reflexive, open to inquiry, and critically engaging in all aspects of the research process. Criticality is important to understanding how the interpretations, assumptions, and background of the researcher can influence the research process. In the current study, I worked towards criticality by meeting with community members, such as school staff and students, and my university supervisor. It was through these meetings that I gained diverse perspectives and feedback, such as insights into the cultural safety. This enabled me to

continually challenge and refine my research methodology and interpretations. Additionally, I engaged in regular self-reflection and journaling, which further enhanced my awareness of my own biases and assumptions. As mentioned earlier, these activities transformed my thesis into a profound journey of personal and academic growth, which assisted me to deepen my understanding of my own positionality and gain reflexivity skills.

Integrity, like criticality, involves the researcher engaging in critical reflection and analysis and is essential for valid interpretations. The interpretive process of qualitative research involves subjectivity, as each researcher brings different values and perspectives to the data, and therefore uniquely interprets it. Integrity is satisfied through "recursive and repetitive check of interpretations, as well as humble presentation of findings" (Whittemore & Mandle, 2001, p. 531). In the context of Indigenous communities, research integrity takes on additional layers. It involves building respectful, meaningful relationships and acknowledging historical mistrust towards Western methodologies (Williams & Shipley, 2023). This mistrust is rooted in a history of exploitation and misrepresentation by Western institutions (Williams & Shipley, 2023). As a researcher from a Western institution, I recognize the importance of approaching Indigenous communities with sincerity, aiming to listen, learn, and collaborate. With respect to this, reciprocity was a guiding principle. When commencing the research project, ICHS was already involved in the MMIWG March and the MMIWG Calls for Justice were already published, signifying gendered violence against Indigenous peoples as a critical issue to be addressed. Therefore, this crisis was a pre-existing concern for the community and was foundational to shaping my research agenda. My point is that I did not enter this project prioritizing academic gain above community needs. Instead, I aimed to offer benefits not only to the ICHS community but also to broader Indigenous communities, aligning with needs and priorities identified by

Indigenous communities themselves. The research responded to an emerging issue, MMIWG, recognized by Indigenous peoples both politically and socially. As such, the implications of this study are intended to benefit both ICHS specifically and broader Indigenous communities. Therefore, this reciprocity was fundamental from the project's inception. Such an approach fostered trust and ensured that the research outcomes aligned with the community's aspirations. It was a collaborative journey, rooted in respect, humility, and partnership, essential principles for conducting research with integrity in Indigenous contexts.

Ethics

The current study was approved on May 2, 2023 by the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board 1 under the project name "Exploring the Effects of Activism: Promoting Indigenous Youth's Voices", Pro00128067.

It is also important to consider the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS) in relation to the current study. TCPS provides guidelines for research involving human participants and has three core principles (TCPS2, 2022).

The first principle, Respect for persons, acknowledges that humans have value and are owed respect (TCPS2, 2022). This first principle influences research, as participant autonomy must be respected and the autonomy of vulnerable groups must be protected (TCPS2, 2022). For example, participants are free to think and make decisions without others interfering (TCPS2, 2022).

Regarding the current research, participants were required to provide informed and ongoing consent. As such, participants were told they could withdraw from the study at any point. An information letter, outlining the risks and benefits, was provided and reviewed with the participants beforehand (see Appendix B and Appendix C).

Participants' information was kept private and securely stored. Participant names were kept separately from the data, and all participant identifying information was removed before publication.

Importantly, full confidentiality could not be guaranteed as the current study involved a group discussion. Therefore, participants were made aware that what they said would be heard by others in the group, and that the researcher could not control what participants decided to share outside of the group discussion. Before the study started, the researcher stressed the importance of confidentiality, privacy, and respect to all participants to manage this potential harm.

The second principal, Concern for welfare, considers the quality of a person's experience of life, which is impacted by a variety of factors. The factors can be individual (e.g., physical, mental, spiritual health) or circumstantial (e.g., as physical, economic, social circumstances) (TCPS2, 2022). Concern for welfare means all foreseeable risks are shared with participants (TCPS2, 2022). In addition, the researchers should strive to balance risks and potential benefits, from the beginning of the research process (TCPS2, 2022).

The potential benefits of this study outweighed the risks. We recognized the potential for the research to generate knowledge that benefits the welfare of society, given that we aimed to challenge the dominant deficit-based narrative about Indigenous peoples.

It was also important to consider the nature of the topic and the possibility that participants might experience some level of discomfort. To address this possibility, appropriate measures were put in place to put the participants at ease during the group discussion. For example, the group discussion was held at a familiar communal location (i.e., Inner City High School), a trusted staff member was present to facilitate a supportive space, Indigenous cultural

supports were available, and a list of low-cost counselling resources was provided (see Appendix D). In addition, all staff at ICHS were familiar with trauma-informed care. Therefore, there were many trusted and trained adults on site who could provide support to participants if needed.

The third principal, Justice, involves treating people with fairness and equity (TCPS2, 2021). In research, this means that all participants are treated with equal respect and concern (i.e., fairness) and that participation does not overly burden or exclude benefits from a specific group (i.e., equity) (TCPS2, 2022). It was also important to consider participants who have vulnerabilities, such as limited decision-making capacity or access to opportunities and power (TCPS2, 2022). With Justice in mind, participants were able to conveniently take part in the study. The researcher was flexible with their schedule and adjusted the group discussion time to meet the needs of participants. Participants were able to join the group discussion at ICHS, a central and convenient location for ICHS students. In addition, one participant was unable to attend but still wanted to participate, so they were able to submit their responses electronically.

Summary

In sum, this chapter outlined the methods that were employed for the current study. Oriented by a transformative worldview, this study was guided by CBPR, qualitative description, and Indigenous methodologies. I described my data collection and analysis procedures, participant engagement, as well as the ways in which this study adhered to principles of rigor and ethics. Next, I describe the findings of my thesis research.

Chapter 4: Findings

In this chapter, I detail the findings of this thesis related to the research questions: (1) What are the perspectives of Indigenous youth at ICHS with respect to actions that can be taken in response to the MMIWG crisis? and (2) How can attending the MMIWG March affect Indigenous youth at ICHS? Four overarching themes were interpreted, with thirteen codes connecting to these themes, and thirty-nine subcodes connecting to these codes. Below, each theme is described, along with codes, subcodes (in italics), and quotes from participants.

Themes

Before providing a narrative description, themes, codes and subcodes are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Themes, Codes, and Subcodes

Theme	Code	Subcode
Importance of Acknowledgement and Awareness	Broadening the Focus of the MMIWG Movement	Acknowledgment of MMIWG+
		More than just a day
	Awareness	Raising awareness
		Lack of awareness
		Counter-productive awareness
	Constructive Forms	March

	of Activism During the March	Storytelling
		Chants
		Facepaint
		Posters and signs
		Music
Systems of Power and Influence	Social Media	
	Government	Superficial support
		Desire for genuine support
	Education	Lack of Indigenous Inclusion
		Teaching our younger generations
	Justice System	Wanting justice
		Inaction
Historical and Ongoing Injustices	Systemic Racism	Residential Schools
		Experienced trauma
		Stolen land
		Difficulty accessing culture

	Society	Marginalization
		Public responsibility
		Uncertainty
Resiliency and Healing	Inclusivity	Recognition of shared experiences
		Welcoming
		Teaching
		Wanting support
	Personal Growth	Being challenged
		Lasting impact
		Wanting to learn
	Sources of Strength	Culture
		Spirituality
		Community
		Personal connection to the crisis
	Sentiments During the March	Mixed emotions
		Positive emotions

		Negative emotions

Note. This table presents the identified themes, codes, and subcodes from the analysis of participant discussions about their experiences and perspectives related to the MMIWG March.

Theme 1: Importance of Acknowledgement and Awareness

Students shared the importance of both acknowledgement and awareness regarding the MMIWG crisis. Within this theme, participants spoke about: (1) Broadening the Focus of the MMIWG Movement, (2) Awareness, and (3) Constructive Forms of Activism During the March.

Broadening the Focus of the MMIWG Movement

Students voiced their views on expanding the definition of MMIWG to include a broader spectrum of affected individuals and persistent recognition of the movement beyond one specific day.

In particular, students emphasized the *Acknowledgment of MMIWG+*, in that the issue of MMIWG extends to other people beyond women and girls in their communities. One youth stated, "We support our sisters every day. We support our brothers every day. Our children," emphasizing the day-to-day support required for *all* members of their communities, including men and boys. Another youth explained that although the MMIWG movement is about Indigenous women and girls, a focus on men, boys, and two-spirited individuals is also warranted. This explanation was enriched by students sharing personal experiences:

> I would describe what MMIWG stands for as 'Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls'. However, it's not only women and girls. Others include men, boys, and two-spirit. I would mention my own experience growing up being a young girl and being targeted by men in all places.

Also in line with broadening the focus of the MMIWG movement, students were clear that recognition should encompass *More than just a day*, meaning that continuous recognition of the crisis was warranted. The youth expressed a desire for recognition and honour that extends beyond designated days, such as May 5th. One remarked, "It'd also be nice too, if our people were honoured every day except for just orange shirt day and MMIW too, right?" Similarly, another youth affirmed, "So, even if they say that MMIW red dress day is not just on that day. It's every day." This indicates a call for ongoing awareness and remembrance that goes beyond an annual event. Adding to this, one student reflected on the depth of honour provided: "And I guess in a way you wish it could honour them more somehow," suggesting a longing for a more profound and impactful recognition, potentially extending beyond one specific day.

Awareness

Students spoke about different facets of awareness surrounding the MMIWG crisis, including raising awareness, the existing lack of awareness, and the challenges of counterproductive awareness.

With respect to *Raising awareness,* students emphasized the methods in which awareness is being raised about the MMIWG crisis. One explained the role of cultural expression and education in awareness-raising: "So, it's part of our job. Like with my song, practically that's what I gotta do. Educate, talk to more people, speak to more upper people, stuff like that. Go to schools, stuff like that. Universities, all that."

Another youth highlighted the importance of continuous visibility and engagement in raising awareness: "So, I always see it out on the street every day. People doing it, people protesting, all that. So yeah, it's all about keeping it persistent."

Students also highlighted ambitions for targeting global and cross-cultural populations. One youth stated: "I want to be able to see red dress day and MMIW everywhere around the world, except just in Canada. It deserves to be in the USA. It deserves to be across the world. It deserves to be." Another youth expressed, "It would be like a big fat slap of reality to them. And maybe they would want it. Like spread awareness to like their culture too."

Students also expressed their intentions behind their awareness-raising efforts, focusing on action and increasing understanding. As one youth stated: "My hopes are that more people know what MMIW stands for and what it represents." Another youth shared:

> I hope some of these actions help raise awareness of the MMIWG2S crisis. Also, hoping that Canadians will look more into this issue that happens continuously on the daily. As well as to create a better understanding and for others to help stop violence against Indigenous peoples.

In addition to highlighting the methods, targets, and intentions of awareness-raising, discussions also centered around *Lack of awareness.* Students noted the significant gaps in public knowledge about the MMIWG crisis globally. One youth noted, "...majority of the world is very unaware of it," while another highlighted the USA, "...Say if I went to USA and talk to America about the missing and murdered Indigenous woman, they said 25% wouldn't even know about it." Another student stated: "Everybody should know about it. Not just one nation. Everybody should know about it because words need to be expressed. Right? The news needs to be expressed."

International gaps in awareness were also a concern, with references to Indigenous populations outside of Canada: "There's native tribes in like Australia too, and we have no idea about them, and I feel like they have no idea about us." Another student lamented the global

silence on similar issues: "...There's millions of other Indigenous people around the world that have the same problem as us. But, it's not getting taken nationwide, how it should be."

Students also surmised that the lack of awareness was at least in part due to a lack of accessible information. One youth stated:

> What makes this least helpful is the lack of publishing of MMIWG, knowledge and understanding. There should be more published topics surrounding MMIWG and more posters during the movement, so that when people are walking by they can read about MMIWG2S.

The sentiment of inadequate recognition was succinctly expressed by another participant: "My concern is that it's not getting enough recognition it deserves."

Discussions around awareness also broached the idea of *Counterproductive awareness.* Students expressed concerns about actions that might undermine the cause. For example, one youth criticized activists who engage in inappropriate retaliatory actions for attention in order to increase awareness:

> Two wrongs don't make a right. So, anything that they do in the name of missing and murdered Indigenous women, and then they do something bad. That's the quite opposite of what we're trying to achieve. Like we're trying to gain attention, but not that type of attention.

Constructive Forms of Activism During the March

Students outlined the diverse and impactful ways in which they engage in activism during Marches to raise awareness and promote the MMIWG cause.

Discussions around forms of activism involved the *March* itself. Students described the strategic importance of marching in highly visible urban areas to capture public attention. One

youth noted: "Perhaps those marches [are most helpful] because it's in the middle of downtown. Where everyday life happens. Where everyone passes by. So, it's something that you just can't ignore. It's like something you have to watch."

Storytelling was highlighted as a powerful means of activism that involved sharing personal and collective traumas. For instance, a youth recounted sharing her story at the March:

I did speak in front of people last year at the march. I shared the story about my best friend. She was a 15-year-old girl that went out drinking and was on her way home when two other young individuals followed her, severely beat her, and left her in the snow. She wasn't found until the next morning. She passed away sometime in December 2018. It's going to be five years since she passed away. Even though it's been so many years, her passing still hurts me. What makes me sad the most is that she never got to experience life to the fullest, meaning that she never got to have a family, experiencing what it's like to have her first child, never got to see graduation and get married. I wish she was still her and I wish I got to take more pictures with her since I only have one, however I will cherish this picture forever and continue to have her in my heart until the end of time.

One student emphasized the importance of "people being able to speak their truth, their stories of relatives who went missing or been murdered and sharing their trauma they have faced." Another youth stated that storytelling allowed them to honour their loved ones: "How the MMIW honour my loved ones was just by having a day to recognize them, even the stories that were told we would say the girls' names just to acknowledge them."

Another form of activism discussed included *Chants* that were used as a vocal expression of protest and solidarity. Students found chanting to be a moving and effective form of expression. One described, "…When we were at the market we were saying chants: no more

stolen sisters on stolen land. And it was really moving." Another described, "[The most helpful form of activism is] yelling chants at the movement such as 'No more stolen sisters! We are human, not trash!' So, we can be heard and recognized by other people we live with in the community."

Face paint, often in red, was seen as an essential part of activism and used symbolic imagery to communicate messages. A youth explained, "We put red face paint over our mouth", while another stated, "I feel like all of us wore red. Like at least 99% of us wore red. Face paint and everything."

The creation of *Posters and signs* was another common method of activism. These visual elements helped convey messages and facts about MMIWG. A student noted,

> The actions I have seen the most helpful are our students creating some posters of loved ones and relatives that either went missing or have been murdered. What makes this helpful is having people inside or outside the school look at these posters and process and have a better understanding of MMIWG.

Another youth mentioned signs during the March:

> There's women that gather up. There's guys all gathered up in red, and they all go up on the side of the street. They point their signs. They hang up the signs. They put up the pictures of the women too.

Lastly, *Music* was discussed as a form of activism. A youth shared how his music was used to reach a broader audience, particularly the youth: "Everybody should know about it… That's why I'm trying to do it in music too. Cause all these kids listen to music. Right? So, I'm trying to do it in a way so all these kids listen to it."

Theme 2: Systems of Power and Influence

Students discussed the critical role of various power structures in influencing the awareness, perception, and resolution of the MMIWG crisis. They described platforms and institutions that use their influence, either advancing the cause or hindering the progress in terms of (1) Social Media, (2) the Government, (3) Education, and (4) the Justice System.

Social Media

Students highlighted social media as a crucial platform for disseminating information and rallying support for the MMIWG cause. They recognized the pervasive influence of social media in society and its role in facilitating broad awareness of the crisis due to its accessibility. When specifying which platforms, the youth mentioned "mainstream ones." For example:

> Like the news, Instagram, Facebook, all that. Everywhere it is. Like, I can hit Facebook right now and there I can find like a bunch of pages of both MMIW. I can go on the news and there's at least probably talking about at least one. Yeah. So, it's, it's practically everywhere.

Despite the extensive reach of social media, students also pointed out areas in which social media could be more effectively used in terms of wider publishing of more substantive and ongoing content to educate and inform the public.

Government

In their discussion, students evaluated the support from government officials and politicians in the MMIWG cause, as well as the need for more action to take place.

In particular, they emphasized the *Superficial support* provided by government bodies and politicians, sharing their perspectives that the government does not show genuine support nor action. As one youth noted:

Like Why? Why do you guys talk about it every day? Why do you guys shove this in our face on the news? Why do you guys talk about this to a million other people? But yet you don't do nothing. You don't come out, right? They just talk about it, but don't do nothing. I'm like, I want to see something.

Another youth mentioned the inconsistency of government support in terms of attending the March and engaging in advocacy more generally: "Before in 2021, there was a lot of freaking counselors that came out [to the march] and a lot of people. [After] there was nobody." One student shared feeling as though political figures often engage only when it benefits them, and expressed disappointment about the lack of politicians attending the most recent March: "But not one face showed. We still show, but they don't. They'll come out if they're getting paid for it, but they won't come out if we want them to or if we need them to. They won't."

Students also criticized politicians for not incorporating their support for MMIWG into their personal lives, suggesting a disconnect between their public declarations and private actions. For example, one youth stated, "Cause like on their job time, they talk about it and all that. But, in their private life they do nothing about it. They need to be more involved in their private life." Another youth emphasized a similar perspective:

Take time outta their private life to like show support and all that. Like, one day out of a year you can take your feet off the table, get out the door, put on a red shirt, and show some pride.

Students also mentioned specific politicians, pointing out the lack of support. One mentioned the prime minister:

Justin Trudeau was just here this month. He could have come here on May 5th to support, but yet he came 10 days after to go support some event at the expo center for only a

couple hours and then go back to wherever he was. If you guys are able to fly back and forth from Ontario to the USA and back to Canada, I think you guys are able to come support an event that you guys made us put on. An event that you guys made us have to do. Mm-hmm. Again, it's not that main person's fault, but it's the person that was in the parliament at that time's fault. So, if you guys gave us the pain and stuff to where we had to go to these events, at least come support us, right?

Similarly, another student talked about a local Member of Parliament who did not appear to be actioning support:

Like, I respect the dude and all. He was out in the city during MMIW day. He was out in the city in that day, but he didn't show up to it. If you guys really support the Indigenous people, and you guys really support the Indigenous women, and you guys say that you guys do. Then show it, you know. Don't tell us that you guys love to support us, but then don't show it. You got to see it to believe, right?

Other students brought up the province's current premier, who they were aware had claimed Indigenous heritage without backing these claims with action-oriented support. As one youth noted, "She said that she was treaty native, and she got tested and she wasn't." Similarly, another participant noted how:

The only time it's talked about is during their [politicians] little speeches. So, they need to do more physical stuff than just talking. Like she says the treaty stuff, if you're really treaty and you're really native, prove that you're native. Come out, come out and show that you're native.

In this way, students also emphasized the *Desire for genuine support.* They voiced a strong desire for authentic and sustained support from government officials, emphasizing the

impact that such genuine involvement could have. One youth talked about high-ranking officials at MMIWG events: "It would be nice for them to show up to the marches…The Premiers. Because they tell a lot of stories at the marches. Understand." Another added, "I think that [the government coming to the march] would also show the world and everything about it too. Like a Prime Minister cares about it, so maybe everyone else should."

They reiterated that genuine support would mean politicians living advocacy and support rather than simply voicing support in public and politically strategic ways. As another youth stated:

> We talked about how politicians didn't show up and all that. I would like to see some public figures show publicly, you know? Like take time out of their private life to come and show up and not just take time out of their job.

The authenticity and genuineness of the support that students desired was simplified by a youth with a mention of basic human emotions: "If you guys [politicians] talk about us all the time in the news, come support us. Show it. Show us that you guys actually care. That's what I'm saying. Show that. Just show love and care. That's it."

Education

Students also touched on the ways in which the educational system addresses, or often neglects, the distinct needs and histories of Indigenous peoples, especially concerning the MMIWG crisis.

In particular, students described the *Lack of Indigenous inclusions* in the education system. They specifically expressed concern over the generalized approaches schools often take to working with students, which fails to acknowledge or address the specific cultural and historical contexts of Indigenous students. One youth noted: "They just treat everyone as one

certain group. Like they're all just students, but they don't look past that and see their ethnicity. So, each person has like different set of problems cause they determine [by] their ethnicity." Similarly, another student talked about struggling with their identity, exacerbated by an educational curriculum that can feel irrelevant to their histories, current realities, and lived experiences:

> Like us. We are trying to learn our own languages and don't know who we are. But then at the same time we're learning other stuff that has nothing to do with us. Yeah. So, we're filling in the void with stuff that's not even meant to be there.

Moreover, the lack of recognition for or focus on MMIWG within schools was highlighted by students as a significant omission; "I feel like public schools don't have a lot of recognition for all of it [MMIWG]. And public schools are where most of the students are, so I feel like they should have it [recognition for MMIWG]." Another youth stressed the need for education on colonization, specific to Canada's history: "More schools need to learn about the horrible past Canada has."

Discussion about schools also highlighted the importance of *Teaching our younger generation.* Students emphasized early gradual integration of the systemic issues facing Indigenous peoples, such as the MMIWG crisis, into education systems. One youth described the benefits of centering learning of Indigenous content from a young age:

> I say these kids knowing it sooner before they got to this age, it won't mess 'em up mostly. Cause they got a hang of it, and they're able to take a talk from it or learn from it and from other people. It's cause us older people are the ones that teach the kids. Right? So, it's our jobs to talk to 'em about this stuff, but also not trigger them about it. Take it and learn from it, and take it and just expand your knowledge about it. Expand what you

think about it instead of taking yourself down from it. That's why I always say try to teach kids about it younger before you get to this age. Cause this age is where your mental health is messing with you, right? Your hormones are messing with you. As a kid, you're kind of still happy. And these kids are curious. They want to know. So, it's better to tell these kids now. Cause as they grow up, they start talking about it more and more and more, and then they just keep it in their brain. That's what I notice. Teach our kids younger and teach your kids before we can't teach 'em at all.

Another noted the importance of gradual familiarization that could lead into immersive experiences:

It's better to grow up around it. It's like dipping your toe in hot water, right? You just gradually put it in and then you get your whole body in. It's better doing that then just jumping in and then you just feel all of the hotness right away. You know? You gotta like gradually do it, and then just accept it, and then be one with it.

Given the lack of meaningful integration of Indigenous content in schools, students also highlighted the role of community in educating younger generations:

I love that people are teaching the children too. The children have the red paint on their faces. Mom's sitting there talking to them and aunties going up to the children and smudging them, teaching 'em about what the smudge is about.

Students also expressed hopes for future educational impacts: "I hope to see my little siblings learning about this in their school, right?" and "I hope to see my little siblings and their friends learn and know about MMIW." As a result, they also discussed the potential for the next generation to contribute to social change in positive and action-oriented ways: "And [hope] the newer generations to come to help fix it more. They want to help." and "Seeing like little kids

there and getting excited. Like what the new generation could do for themselves. Yeah. Like seeing them like with new information and what they can do with it."

Justice System. Another system of power and influence mentioned by students was the Justice System. Youth discussed how the MMIWG crisis is being addressed, sharing desires for justice and their observations of inaction.

Through their discussion, students voiced how they were *Wanting justice*, and expressed a desire for concrete outcomes in MMIWG cases. One youth stated, "I wanna see more justice," While another stated, "I want to see more people actually being found."

Similarly, another youth outlined wanting a detailed record of MMIWG cases with solutions and accountability:

I want to see a full book of people that were actually found, what happened to them, where they are now, if they're safe or if they pass on. We want to know what happened to these people instead of just saying, 'We don't know where they are or what happens to them'. We want to know. We wanna open a book and be able to know what happened and how it's gonna end. And how we're able to fix this problem later on after that.

Similar to the sentiments expressed about the government, *Inaction* was also part of the discussion. Students criticized the lack of proactive measures from law enforcement. One youth stated: "That's what the police do a lot of the time. Where they just talk about it. But they won't do anything about it."

Theme 3: Historical and Ongoing Injustices

During the discussion, students spoke about historical and ongoing injustices, which can be conceptualized in terms of: (1) Systemic Racism and (2) Society.

Systemic Racism

Systemic Racism is a foundational issue that contributes significantly to the MMIWG crisis. Understanding how participants view systemic racism is important for uncovering the actions that can be taken in response to the crisis and contextualizing the issue to enhance the understanding of the March's significance and, consequently, its impact. Students explored how historical and ongoing policies and discriminatory practices continue to perpetuate systemic racism, trauma and cultural dislocation.

In this area, students shared personal disclosures about *Residential schools*, including impacts on themselves and their families. One youth emphasized her family's resistance to residential school, which empowers her to learn more about other injustices:

> My kokum's dad actually during the residential times... We have a cabin out in the reservation and during the residential times, he built that cabin and kept her there. Just cause they were going out into the reservations taking all the kids, right. So, just from those stories. My kokum is actually one to tell all those tales. And just from those is that... that's one reason why I'm like, okay, I'm still able to learn about this. Because I still have her, and I'm still able to carry those stories from back then. So, that's why I'm glad we're still doing it today. Cause now I'm able to learn new things about it. I'm still able to learn about the past. I'm still able to learn about now too. Yeah. So, it's good to be learning from the past and the present.

This youth detailed how her family's history of residential schools, a result of systemic racism, impacts her today, providing a deeper understanding of the significance of resisting systemic injustices.

Experienced trauma was also a point of discussion, where students shared their own experience of injustices. One youth shared how her own experiences influenced her participation in the March:

> It influenced my participation because of my own life experience growing up. These
> include being victimized, sexualized, discriminated, and facing a lot of challenges
> growing up.

Another youth mentioned her personal connection with the MMIWG crisis: "[I] actually grew up knowing about missing and murdered indigenous women because my mushum had 12 sisters. They were all brutally like murdered."

Stolen land was also emphasized within the context of systemic racism; one youth stated, "Because this place is Indigenous land right? It got taken from us, right?..." This assertion alludes to the history of land appropriation fueled by systemic racism to marginalize Indigenous peoples, directly contributing to the conditions that perpetuate the MMIWG crisis.

Finally, *Difficulty accessing culture* was mentioned in relation to system racism. Students talked about the barriers to practicing and maintaining cultural traditions. One youth mentioned the lack of ceremonial facilities within Edmonton:

> Like we accepted the way they have their way of life, their churches, their whatnots.
> They have a church every few blocks. Right? But we don't have sweat lodges or
> ceremonies every few blocks. We gotta go out of town to go do that.

Another youth emphasized the challenges in constructing and accessing places for cultural practices:

> And even 15, 10 years, this project's in the sweat lodge. It's still not even done yet. To be
> honest, it only takes not even a few weeks to build a sweat lodge. And that's just with

sticks and blankets and maybe a little cabin. But then for them it's taken away over 10 years and millions of dollars of money.

Furthermore, one student brought up transportation barriers to accessing culture: "Some people can't even like attain transportation to go to ceremonies." These insights into the barriers faced in accessing cultural practices underline the necessity for targeted actions that combat systemic racism and that can be implemented in response to the MMIWG crisis.

Society

Students also explored the general public's contributions to historical and ongoing injustices Indigenous peoples experience. More specifically, they expressed how society has both marginalized Indigenous communities and contributed to a feeling of uncertainty, while also having a public responsibility to support and effect change regarding the MMIWG movement.

In relation to society, students spoke about *Marginalization*. Marginalization occurs when people are systematically excluded from meaningful participation in economic, social, political, cultural and other forms of human activity in their communities and thus are denied the opportunity to fulfil themselves as human beings (Jenson, 2000). Students in this study described how Indigenous peoples are marginalized and there is a lack of acceptance regarding Indigenous cultures. As one youth stated, "Like we should already be our own peoples and have our own traditions. And all that should already be accepted in the way of life of other people around us."

Discussion about society also centered around *Public responsibility* in terms of how the general public should involve themselves in the MMIWG movement. One student shared, "I feel that everyone should be involved that want to stand with us and put an end to violence against Indigenous peoples."

In addition, students recognized the benefits of having the public's support: "If more like multi-cultures, like actually cared about this. And so they [government] would have to listen to like everyone." Similarly another youth shared how the general public could help make tangible change:

> If it's not impacting their group [political party] or whatever's happening within them. Like if they're not getting enough complaints from the public around whatnot, then it's not of use to them. They only take care of what they want to take care of.

Discussion around society and the lack of recognition brought up feelings of *Uncertainty*, specifically about when resolution will happen. Students also acknowledged, despite their efforts, they struggle for societal-level recognition of Indigenous peoples' rights and issues. One youth talked about their uncertainty while mentioning wanting to be heard:

> Yeah. It's good that we do these things. And it's awesome that we keep lot of this. But how long do we have to keep doing this for, until we actually get heard? Like, do we have to keep going for another 34 years? Are we gonna pass on and our kids have to keep doing this? Like, we want to hear a voice, at least before we do something in our lives, right?

Similarly, another youth questioned how much will be enough, expressing a sense of fatigue and disillusionment about activism efforts:

> My concerns about the MMIWG2S is that how many protests or movements does the Indigenous peoples have to do? Just to be recognized about? Heard? Also, are we going to continue to go missing and being murdered, regardless of how much we try to speak up and fight for our rights? Are we going to be forgotten? Is the MMIWG2S crisis going to be forgotten? There are the concerns I think about from time to time. Another thing to

add is that with all these movements surrounding the crisis is that the government is not going to be able to keep up and eventually forget about it. Just like to do with every issue that happens around Canada.

Theme 4: Resilience and Healing

During the discussion, students explored the ways they and their communities exhibited resiliency and engaged in healing during the March. The findings under this theme are described in terms of four primary codes: (1) Inclusivity, (2) Personal Growth, (3) Sources of Strength, and (4) Sentiments during the March.

Inclusivity

Students highlighted Indigenous peoples' openness to share their experiences and learn from and teach others.

In this area, discussions revealed a *Recognition of shared experiences* among Indigenous and other colonized groups globally. One student reflected on the universal challenges faced by Indigenous peoples: "There's still a million other people, a million other Indigenous people around the world that have their land taken from them too. So, that's why I would say that it wasn't just people in Canada too…" Another youth mentioned, "There's native tribes in like Australia too, and we have no idea about them, and I feel like they have no idea about us." Similarly, a student shared their interaction with a friend from a different cultural background than theirs, noting shared experiences of colonization and oppression, and how this fostered their understanding:

Well, I met a homie from Regina. He is Filipino, and his whole entire family is Christian because he told me that they were colonized by Spain and all that. So now they're still

holding onto all that and they've been oppressed too. So now their identity is now Christian.

The discussion around inclusion also involved Indigenous peoples being *Welcoming*. During the MMIWG March, Indigenous peoples invite non-Indigenous people to join, which illustrates an ability to heal and demonstrate resilience despite past and ongoing harms. A student described their approach to inclusivity: "We don't say, go away. Stay away from our event. We actually bring people in. Yeah. That's why like too. We don't just shove 'em away. We bring 'em in. We help." This welcoming environment was apparent during the March, as another participant recalled, "What I enjoyed about the MMIWG2S march was how supporting and welcoming people were, with bottles of water and being provided food."

Teaching non-Indigenous people was another topic of discussion. Students shared how Indigenous peoples, including themselves, took a role in educating non-Indigenous people both at and outside the march, further demonstrating resilience and healing. One youth explained their interaction with people passing by the event:

> People just walking through the park, asking what this event is about. Or people just wanting to know about why we're all wearing red dresses. Those aunties too go up to those people and say, this is smudge. This is an event for this. This is how we pray. This is how we cleanse our bodies and our minds with bad energy or spirits. That's what I like too, is that we don't shut away people from our events. We take them and and teach them about it. They want to know. We'll teach them about it.

Another recounted the positive feedback from diverse attendees after performing a song at the March:

I always tell everybody this is that my first performance there, I had mostly other cultured people come up and shook my hand and talk to me about what that song was. That makes me think a lot too. Cause a lot of people, sometimes a lot of us, have that thought, like other cultures don't care or they don't really realize what's going on. But I always think back to that performance, when all those people came and shook my hand is, cause it was more of those culture people than the native people. Cause they wanted to learn. Right. They wanted to know. And that makes me happy is cause I'm like, okay, there's more cultures that are going through the same thing we are too. So, I'm able to teach 'em about this. And they're like, okay, now I can relate to somebody with this.

Students were also clear that inclusion of non-Indigenous people through teaching does not just happen at the March, but also expands beyond the day of action. One youth explained:

Some of them are actually really caring. I met a old lady one time. She was from a different culture. But I told her a few things and she broke down. She was solely heartbroke. She was like, I didn't know any of that. She was really supportive. A lot of them are and they will be.

Personal Growth

Students reflected on the personal transformations and insights they gain through their involvement in MMIWG activism. These experiences were found to challenge them, lead to self-realizations, have a lasting impact, and encourage a continuous desire to learn.

Discussions about personal growth involved the idea of *Being challenged.* Students described how the Marches and activities push them outside of their comfort zone. One youth shared, "The march challenges me by just being around people and yelling on the top of my lungs". Similarly, another youth spoke to how participation in the March helped her to push past

her experiences of anxiety caused by being around other people: "I'm a very quiet person. Like I said, pushing to get out there and yell. I have bad anxiety with people. I was right up in that march surrounded by people. I have no anxiety right now."

Personal growth discussions also centered around *Self realizations.* Through engaging in the March, participants realized new strengths and passions. A student expressed discovering their interest in social justice, by stating, "I realize I like fighting for causes, not just for this cause, but like other causes I could help with potentially." Another discovered their tenacity: "I didn't realize how much fight I had in me until the March. Just yelling top of my lungs, throwing up my signs, wearing my red, scary face paint. I'm like, "yeah, go fight"".

Further reflections highlighted emotional growth in terms of realizing one's strengths through a sense of collective uplifting. One youth stated,

> ...These events make me realize that I'm strong. Cause sometimes I feel weak and low, and I'm like, "wha... life sucks". But then at the same time, when I hit those events... I'm like, whoa, we all care about each other. These people are bringing me up as a person too.

Similarly, another student shared their learnings about their own emotionality, sense of connectedness, and resolve to speak out, which were realized through participation in the March:

> I learned that I am very emotional when talking about deep stuff and that I am not alone because there is so many people in my community that is there for me and that I'm there for them. I also learned that we shouldn't stay silent it is always good to talk about what's on your mind.

Also in the context of personal growth, students spoke to the ways in which they experienced the March as having a *Lasting impact*. They reflected on the ways in which moments during the March continue to influence them "to this day" and "till right now."

Exploring deeper into the idea of lasting impact, one youth noted the persistent engagement of the crowd at the March, even when the event was finished: "There was still a lot of people. When it was supposed to end and we're all still standing there." Another youth stated unresolved questions as a reason for the lasting impact: "It posed a long-lasting impact on me because it makes me wonder, where these people are after how many years, why certain individuals were victims and why it keeps happening today."

A third youth talked about the daily reminders that inspire his commitment:

> I still watch the videos every day. I still look at the posts every day. I looked at the posts from last year's cause it reminds me of who I am. It reminds me of what we're fighting for every day. It reminds me that when I'm doing my songs, I'm doing it for my people, and I'm doing it for the children, for everybody else. Those things give me the good sense of we're doing this for a reason and we're not gonna give up.

> Lastly, discussions on personal growth involved *Wanting to learn* more about their culture and history. One student mentioned being disconnected from her culture and a desire to know more: "My personal life I didn't really grow up into knowing any of this stuff because my family doesn't really know much but that's why I am here to learn about my culture's past." Another shared their appreciation of being able to learn, in part through participation in the March, by stating:

> So, that's why I'm glad we're still doing it today. Cause now I'm able to learn new things about it. I'm still able to learn about the past. I'm still able to learn about now too. Yeah. So, it's good to be learning from the past and the present.

Sources of Strength

Students highlighted the ways in which Indigenous peoples are able to draw on sources of strength to face ongoing challenges. These specific sources include connections to culture, spirituality, community, and personal experiences related to the MMIWG crisis.

A significant source of strength described by participants involved *Culture*. Students highlighted how their cultural practices and traditions provide a foundational strength and sense of identity. One youth shared how their cultural upbringing was integral to their worldview and sense of who they are:

> Well, personally, I grew up in the res from when I was a very young age to 12. So, I grew up all around all that spiritualness and all that cultural stuff. So, my dad being a very spiritual medicine man kind of guy, like almost an elder, you know, but also he helps the elders too. So, he himself is still learning. But he also is always trying to be inclusive and all that. So, he brings me along into all these sorts of sweat ceremonies and even introduces me to like this stuff. So, that's why. I just, I grew up around it.

Others spoke about how their engagement in cultural practices prepared them for the March. One youth stated: "I prepared myself mostly spiritually and emotionally just by practically praying and just the normal stuff, you know? Yeah. Just, just normally preparing myself. And smudging."

Students also mentioned the importance of smudging during events, and how this practice was not only important for them currently, but also held broader importance given the historical context:

> How my spirituality and culture played a role in the march is just being able to smudge whenever I get to and that I am allowed to do the stuff my ancestors weren't allowed to do. I know they are smiling down because of what we are healing for them.

Along with smudging, another youth mentioned how drumming was a source of strength in terms of contributing to a sense of connection during the March.

> He was drumming the thing. He was hitting the drum real deadly and on beat, as the chants went on. So, it wasn't just like people talking. It was people like actually being there. Like, you can feel the beat of the drum, like the beat of your heart, you know? So everyone felt connected as one.

Discussion about strength also involved *Spirituality*, which provided comfort during difficult times. Students described how spiritual practices uplift them in general, and with respect to the March more specifically. One youth shared,

> But it's something spiritually for me. Because usually I feel sad at those things. But something up there kept me up at the top. So, I say it was something that just keeps me spiritually, something that was on my side.

Another shared,

> See, I think that's what, I think, that's why I had good spirits that day. Even even the song... the song cut off completely. There was no song, so I had acapella. I think that's another reason why too. I thought I was gonna be in sad spirits that day, but something kept me in my good spirits.

As a source of strength, this spiritual uplifting was also felt during active participation in the March, as one participant shared, "I also felt very spiritually lifted just yelling the chants was really empowering."

A sense of *Community* was also mentioned during discussions about strength, in that being together was conducive to a supportive environment at MMIWG events. Students shared how the March community provides a sense of belonging and emotional support. One shared,

"It's nice to be there… collectively together, as an issue," while another stated, "[it's] nice knowing, fighting for the same cause…. All our people." Others added, "What I liked about the march is that I got to spend time with my relatives and acknowledge why we have this day" and "I'm being reminded that you're a part of the community."

Students also reflected on the emotional support provided by the community, described as an instrumental source of strength. One youth stated:

> I like that all of us come together and just like what he said. Everybody's not just sitting down and sad about it. Everybody is still happy and still strong, able to come together and just show what we're supposed to be showing. Everybody comes together. Instead of just being sad and saying whatever, we all come together and say, we care, we love you, we're here for you. Yeah. It's all about the care. So, it made me feel good that we all came out together to care for each other and love for each other, even if we were feeling so down that day.

Similarly, a student also talked about mutual support among community members as a source of strength:

> Even though we want these people to come out and support us as much as we can, we still come out and support each other. We still come out and hug each other. We still come out and hold each other in each other's arms when we need to be heard or when we are crying or something. It's all about us being together.

Likewise, a youth shared the strong support and determination offered at a grassroots level by community members participating in the March:

> As much as we want these people from the top to be, to be with us, we also have each other as one too. So, so either with or without them, we're still gonna succeed this

regardless. Yeah. Even though I said, how long is this gonna take? One day somebody's gonna be like "okay, we gotta end this". It's not gonna stop.

Students talked about how the sense of unity is particularly empowering for participants, enabling them to overcome personal anxieties and challenges. As one youth shared:

Every native up there all screamed and yelled and made their sounds and all put their arms up…And I'm like, wow. This is how I know that these people care. That's why when I feel low, I think of those events…I know that I ain't alone. All of us feel that same way and in their mind too…And we come together in these events for a reason, just to heal each other from those problems and from that mental health…Even usually when I perform my songs…My freaking heartbeat and pounding, freaking out. Even going out to like a concert and performing there too, I freak out. But when I'm able to perform that song at the MMIW march, I have no anxiety. I'm not scared. Cause I know I'm with all my people. And I know whatever I'm talking about in that song is what these people want to hear, and what these people are feeling, and how it's gonna help them too. When I'm with my people, It gives me no anxiety. I love being with my people. When I'm with my people, it makes me feel connected and strong.

Lastly, discussion about sources of strength involved students' *Personal connection to the crisis.* They talked about how their own personal experiences with the MMIWG crisis motivated their participation and deepened their commitment to the movement. One youth reflected on the personal and familial ties to the issue stating: "That's what motivates us to participate. We have knowledge, family members that were there."

Sentiments during the March

Students shared the wide range of emotions they experienced during the MMIWG March, existing along a spectrum of negative, positive, and mixed feelings.

Discussion about sentiments during the March included *Negative emotions,* and many reported feeling overwhelmed by such emotions. Sadness was one emotion students described experiencing during the March. One youth disclosed crying at the event: "I felt so many emotions, hearing the stories about the missing women. It made me cry so much I had to leave. My teacher told me I was crying for the ones who couldn't."

The inability to fully grasp the extent on injustice was another common reaction, with a student stating, "I just couldn't wrap around my head around the fact that there is so much unjustice that like you couldn't receive it."

Fear was also notably prevalent, with concerns about the event's effectiveness and emotional impact. One youth shared, it's "scary to know if we're doing this all for nothing. You know?" Another talked about fear in anticipation of the event:

> I felt scared. I felt scared that I was gonna feel sad. I felt scared that I wasn't gonna feel the way that I should be feeling, like happy and stuff. Then when I actually got there, and I seen everybody, and I heard the music, and I felt the energy of everybody else, it gave me my own sense of energy. It's just like what I said before. When I'm with my people, all my anxiety and all my problems go and it's cause I know that they're going through the same thing I am. Yeah. So, it's more like I was scared for the moment, but once I stuck with all my people, it just flows away. Gone.

Frustration was talked about in relation to feeling unheard and unacknowledged, with students expressing these feelings as a broader experience of being an Indigenous youth. Youth said, "It's frustrating not being heard" and "It frustrates me that we just want to be heard."

Students also mentioned disappointment. One youth contemplated a range of different emotions, landing on disappointment due to inaction from people in power:

It's mostly… Not an anger or a frustration? It's mostly… Disappointment. There you go. It's like a sad disappointment. Like why? Why do you guys talk about it every day? Why do you guys shove this in our face on the news? Why do you guys talk about this to a million other people? But yet you don't do nothing. You don't come out, right? We just talk about it, but don't do nothing. I'm like, I want to see something.

Another youth shared, "I feel super disappointed for why we even have to do this in the first place" bringing the focus back to the devastating reality of MMIWG in the country.

Discussion also included *Positive emotions.* Students reported a range of uplifting and positive feelings during the MMIWG March. Many students talked about feeling empowered and one described this emotion as resulting from receiving recognition: "It also felt empowering because you were getting recognition that day from a lot of people. Like even some people went there like that, didn't even know about it."

Similarly, another youth mentioned, "I also felt very spiritually lifted, just yelling the chants was really empowering." Another shared feelings of empowerment and pride due to the collective nature of the MMIWG event:

[I felt] empowered. Well, it's because there's so much people. It's like good energy. It's not like everyone just walking around all sad, their heads down. Everyone has their heads up high and we're like, we're just survivors. So, we're living not just for ourselves, but for like those that that couldn't, you know? Yeah. So, it's glad that we see that there's like a huge group of people that actually do want to participate in such a thing.

Students also mentioned feeling prideful and happy that they were able to be part of the March, and another mentioned courage: "In a way, it gives me courage too. It's because it shows that if these people from the top parliament don't want to come out, we still do it regardless." Another elaborated by connecting courage with continuous commitment to ending the MMIWG crisis:

> Mine leads back to courage again cause I say, we're gonna do it again next year. We're gonna do it the year after that. We're gonna do it the decade after that. The decade after that. I say, even after this ends, we still ain't gonna stop it because we don't want it to happen again. Right? We're gonna keep that voice alive for, it's because we don't want this to happen to our women again. We don't want this to happen to our little girls again. We don't want it to happen to the mothers, the fathers, the children, the brothers. We don't want it to happen to anybody. We just want it to end and move on. I say, every time we go to this march, it gives me courage. It's because it gives me the time to come back next year and bring a bigger, louder voice. Just so we can be finally heard. Yeah. So it's all I say courage, it brings me.

Students also spoke about taking comfort in "knowing that everyone [at the March] wanted to see the same result in the end." They also brought up a feeling of freedom, with one participant expressing a feeling of liberation in uniting with people from their own community:

> That's the most freest I ever feel. I feel the most freest when I'm with my people. It's because knowing that we're all just... like what she said... we're all fighting for the same cause. We're all, we're all still the same blood of Native regardless. When we all come together, it makes us feel safe. It's because we're all still family in a way. We all come together. It's because we all still care about each other. We all still need to cry on each other's arms.

Students also expressed feeling a strong sense of support from Elders, friends, and the wider community through participation in the March, "Knowing that everybody came together and showed each other love, support, and care." Similarly, they spoke about how the March made them feel more connected to the cause and others "cause you know it's there, but now you're actually seeing it there." Similarly, another youth stated, "The impact that MMIW have on my feelings of connection is that it made me more connected with my people like the fact that we were all there for the same reason." In this way, another participant shared the impact of feeling as though "I had people walking with me that could relate to my trauma, my story, and being challenged." Happiness was also brought up, with a participant stating:

> ...I wanted to feel sad, but something wasn't letting me. It was just keeping me happy. That's what I like. It was a sad event, but it was something that keeps me happy, something that keeps me motivated, something that pushes me to keep pointing my voice towards this event more in the future.

A *Mix of negative and positive emotions* was also brought up. Many students reported feeling a blend of different emotions. As one youth described: "It's also like bittersweet because we're here for not really a good cause. But it's also nice that there's awareness to it, right?" Mixed emotions also related to the large turnout at the March:

> To be honest, I felt like kind of prideful and happy. That all those people showed up in a big group of people, all wearing red. But sad due to the fact that we're in a position that we have to do this to gain attention.

One youth also talked about needing to prepare for the mix of emotion, given how emotional the March had been during the previous year, and another summed up their emotional experience by sharing: "I had a lot of mixed feeling, sadness, anger, and happiness. Mostly happiness."

Chapter 5: Discussion

Through this project, I sought to include Indigenous youth as active agents of change and promote their voices to guide action on the issues that impact them. To explore the effects of engaging in the MMIWG March among Indigenous youth, this project was guided by two research questions: 1) What are the perspectives of Indigenous youth at Inner City High School (ICHS) with respect to actions that can be taken in response to the MMIWG crisis? and 2) How can attending the MMIWG March affect Indigenous youth at ICHS? I anticipated that Indigenous youth who attended the MMIWG March might strengthen their sense of identity, experience empowerment, and create meaning from their experiences, with implications for their wellbeing. To highlight the perspectives and experiences of participants, I employed a qualitative approach guided by Indigenous and community-based participatory research principles. Group discussion took place after the 2023 MMIWG March, and the conversation was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic analysis. In this chapter, I discuss and consolidate the knowledge gathered from engaging with the youth regarding the MMIWG crisis, and situate this knowledge within current literature.

Overview and Interconnection of Key Findings

Four main themes encapsulate participants' perspectives and experiences: (1) the Importance of Acknowledgement and Awareness, (2) Systems of Power and Influence, (3) Historical and Ongoing Injustices, and (4) Resiliency and Healing. Although these themes are distinct, they are also interconnected, with each theme influencing and reinforcing others. The Importance of Acknowledgement and Awareness (i.e., theme 1) highlights the necessity of broadening the understanding of MMIWG to include a diverse group of affected individuals and emphasizes the need for ongoing awareness beyond specific events, despite challenges from

counterproductive actions. This need for awareness is closely linked to Systems of Power and Influence (i.e., theme 2), where the influence of social media, government, schools, and the justice system is highlighted as playing a critical role in shaping public perception and policy, yet often falling short of genuine and sustained engagement. Social media presents itself distinctly from other forms of power as it is being used as a constructive form of activism, yet it can still be conceptualized as a system of power. Superficial support from governmental, educational, and justice institutions ties directly to Historical and Ongoing Injustices (i.e., theme 3), as systemic racism within these power structures continues to impact Indigenous communities, exacerbating issues like cultural disconnection and marginalization. Moreover, society's role in perpetuating these injustices through indifference or lack of engagement highlights a broader cultural and social responsibility. Despite these challenges, Resiliency and Healing (i.e., theme 4) demonstrates the community's strength and capacity for healing, particularly visible during the MMIWG March, where cultural and spiritual practices, personal growth, and the sharing of experiences foster collective healing and empowerment. Together, these themes collectively illustrate a complex interplay of acknowledgment, power dynamics, historical burdens, and the enduring resilience of Indigenous peoples and communities.

Interpretation of Findings

The Impact of the MMIWG March on Indigenous Youth at ICHS

This section explores the impact of the MMIWG March on Indigenous youth at ICHS. I will discuss one main theme in relation to impacts of the March, specifically Resiliency and Healing.

Impact 1: The March Uses a Nation-Building Discourse Leading to Personal Growth. Discussions with youth revealed how involvement in MMIWG advocacy activities led

to significant personal growth. Indigenous youth were challenged to step outside of their comfort zones, leading to self-realizations about their strengths and capacities for advocacy. They expressed emotional growth, recognizing their resilience and the communal support that uplifted them during these events. This personal development was marked by a deepening commitment to social justice and a better understanding of their emotional responses to collective traumas. The youth noted the lasting impact of these experiences, which continued to influence them well after the event, and expressed an ongoing desire to learn more about their culture and history, enriching their personal and communal identities.

The MMIWG March primarily aligns with the nation-building discourse rather than therapeutic discourse (Hartman & Gone 2014; Hartman & Gone, 2016; Parsloe & Campbell, 2021), which shifts focus from individual healing to community empowerment and systemic change (See Table 5). This framework is used to conceptualize trauma (Parsloe & Campbell, 2021), and it aids in contextualizing the personal growth and empowerment observed among the youth.

By participating in the March, youth were not merely attendees but active contributors, a key tenet of the nation-building discourse (Hartman & Gone, 2016; Parsloe & Campbell, 2021). This role encouraged them to explore and assert their capacities for leadership and advocacy, leading to significant personal development. Such engagement highlights the benefit of a nation-building discourse, as it fosters agency toward change rather than reducing trauma to an individual's psychological issue or viewing individuals as passive recipients of therapeutic interventions (Hartman & Gone 2014; Hartman & Gone, 2016; Parsloe & Campbell, 2021). Findings also reflect how the March promoted a deeper connection with cultural heritage and an ongoing commitment to social issues, aspects that the nation-building discourse particularly

supports. The findings further suggest this discourse promotes sustained engagement and learning, which contrasts with a therapeutic approach focused on immediate psychological support. Moreover, the nation-building discourse seems to not only facilitate immediate personal growth but also instill long-term impacts on youth. This is evident as participants continue to draw on their experiences from the March to shape their actions and perspectives on social justice and community leadership. As such, the MMIWG March has proven to be a catalyst for both personal and communal transformation by using a nation-building discourse. It fosters a generation of empowered youth, equipped and motivated to engage in and advocate for systemic changes that go beyond their individual experiences.

Table 5

Comparative Overview of Therapeutic and Nation-Building Discourses

Feature	Therapeutic Discourse	Nation-Building Discourse
Main Focus	Individual suffering and healing	Community empowerment and systemic change
Key Perspective	Psychological-mindedness medicalizes trauma as personal mental health issues	Situates trauma within the context of ongoing systems of oppression; *portrays community members as active change agents*
Impact of Colonization	Often overlooked; trauma framed as a personal issue	Acknowledges the systemic and structural impacts of colonization

Role of Individuals	Viewed primarily as patients requiring healing	Viewed as participants and leaders in resilience and nation-building efforts
Public Narrative Function	Directs attention towards personal recovery and psychological support	Encourages a collective understanding of historical and ongoing injustices; promotes systemic change and empowerment

Note. This table compares the features of Therapeutic and Nation-Building Discourses, drawing on insights from Hartman & Gone (2014, 2016) and Parsloe & Campbell (2021).

Impact 2: The March Facilitated Protective Factors for Indigenous Youth. The findings of the current study emphasized culture, spirituality, and community as major sources of strength. Indigenous youth shared how cultural and spiritual preparations for the March, such as smudging and drumming, provided a sense of connection and continuity with their ancestors. The community's collective presence and support during the March were powerful, helping youth feel belonging as part of a larger movement and less isolated in their struggles. Moreover, a personal connection to the MMIWG crisis often motivated their participation and activism, deepening their commitment to the movement and reinforcing the importance of their involvement.

The current study provides insight into the ways that the MMIWG March offered a distinctive platform for Indigenous youth to engage with several crucial protective factors to support their resilience. These factors—culture, spirituality, community, and personal connections to the crisis—mirror the findings from a systematic literature review by MacDonald and colleagues (2013). Their review involved 15 studies and identified over 40 protective

factors, including culture, spirituality, and community as particularly critical. MacDonald and colleagues study highlighted the unanimous recognition across reviewed articles of the protective nature of engaging with one's culture. They also noted that traditional knowledge and cultural activities significantly boost self-esteem and personal identity, echoing the cultural and spiritual activities such as smudging and drumming reported during the March.

Although personal connection to trauma was not labeled as a protective factor in MacDonald's review, it was related to the topics discussed, such as the significance of cultural histories and resilience stories. While these personal connections to trauma may not serve as protective factors in themselves, they may contribute to a deeper engagement with the culture and community that do. For example, this deeper engagement might occur through connecting with others through storytelling or shared experiences of trauma. Such engagement, fostered by personal connections, allows youth to anchor themselves within a broader cultural and historical context, which may reinforce their resilience by providing a meaningful context for their experiences. Rather than positioning a personal connection to trauma as a protective factor, it may be more accurate to say that for those with such connections, the March was more profoundly impactful. This aspect directly resonates with the March, where personal stories and collective experiences of trauma played a central role in fostering a strong community bond and a deep sense of purpose among the participants.

The unique context of the MMIWG March thus provided Indigenous youth with essential access to protective factors that are vital for their mental health and well-being. This access is particularly crucial for urban Indigenous youth who may be further distanced from their culture and community support systems. The literature suggests that being physically present in one's Indigenous community can be immensely therapeutic. Similarly, the March exemplified a

powerful sense of community and cultural immersion, potentially mirroring these therapeutic benefits.

Both the findings from the systematic review and the current study underscore the interconnectedness of protective factors. These factors often work synergistically to foster an environment that promotes healthy youth development and enhances problem-solving capabilities, resilience, and overall well-being. Thus, the March can be viewed as a culturally-grounded intervention that naturally incorporates these protective factors, providing a blueprint for future initiatives aimed at improving the mental health and well-being of Indigenous youth.

Impact 3: The MMIWG March Led to Positive Changes Associated with Post-Trauma Growth. The March impacted Indigenous youth by encouraging them to be inclusive and eliciting a mix of sentiments, both of which are positive changes associated with post-trauma growth. Participants highlighted their openness to sharing experiences and learning from others, showcasing resilience and healing. They recognized shared experiences with other colonized groups worldwide, underlining a global connection among Indigenous peoples. Indigenous individuals were notably welcoming during the March, actively inviting and educating non-Indigenous people about their cultures and the significance of the MMIWG crisis, thereby fostering an inclusive and supportive environment.

Regarding the mix of sentiments during the March, participants talked about a wide range of emotions, from deep sadness and fear about the effectiveness of their actions and pride in their collective identity and resilience. Participants discussed the cathartic effect of expressing their emotions openly in a supportive environment. Moreover, the mixed emotions illustrate the complex and bittersweet nature of the March, reflecting both the pain of the issues addressed and the strength drawn from community solidarity.

In context of post-trauma growth, relating to others can profoundly alter one's sense of relationship with people. According to Hawley (2014), this might include valuing relationships differently, eliminating unhealthy ones, and experiencing increased compassion or an awakening of responsibility. During the MMIWG March, participants not only shared their personal histories with friends and strangers from different cultural backgrounds, but they also connected over shared experiences of colonization and oppression. This mutual understanding fostered a deeper sense of community and empathy among participants. Furthermore, Indigenous peoples took roles in educating both Indigenous and non-Indigenous attendees about their cultures and the significance of the MMIWG crisis, thereby promoting inclusivity and also embodying post-trauma growth characteristics, such as enhanced interpersonal relationships and communal responsibility (Hawley, 2014).

The emotional experiences described by Indigenous youth also align with Woodward and Joseph's (2003) findings, where post-traumatic growth involves an inner drive toward growth that manifests through various "vehicles of change" such as acceptance, love, liberation, belonging, and connection. Indigenous youth expressed a variety of feelings that occurred during the MMIWG March and can be categorized under vehicles of change, such as feelings of freedom when united with their community. Such expressions illustrate the profound psychological changes that are typical of post-trauma growth—changes in self-perception, gaining new perspectives on life, and importantly, changes in relationships.

Actions that Can be Taken in Response to the Crisis

This section examines the specific actions proposed to address the MMIWG crisis, according to Indigenous youth. I will discuss the remaining three main themes: the Importance of Acknowledgement and Awareness, Systems of Power, and Historical and Ongoing Injustices.

Proposed Action 1: Informed Advocacy and Sustained Engagement. Indigenous youth in this study voiced a call for expanding the focus of the MMIWG movement to encompass a broader range of affected individuals, including men, boys, and two-spirited people. This perspective emphasizes that the crisis impacts a wider segment of the community beyond women and girls, highlighting the need for recognition and support that extends beyond designated days and into consistent, daily acknowledgment. These discussions align with some of the debates that have been going on regarding the MMIWG movement.

There is an ongoing debate about whether to broaden the MMIWG movement to include men, boys, and people who identify as Two-Spirited, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and beyond (2SLGBTQI+) (Hansen & Dim, 2019; Ramnarine, 2023; The National Inquiry, 2016). The debate centers on whether to keep the focus on the distinct, gendered violence against Indigenous women and girls - violence shaped by misogyny and colonialism - or to adopt a broader approach that also addresses the high violence rates among Indigenous men and recognizes gender and sexual diversity within these communities (Hansen & Dim, 2019; The National Inquiry, 2016). Supporters of a focused approach argue that the specific, sexualized violence against Indigenous women and girls requires targeted measures (The National Inquiry, 2016). They worry that expanding the scope might "obfuscate" the movement and lessen the support for the group that has historically been most neglected (The National Inquiry, 2016). Conversely, proponents of a broader scope point out that Indigenous men suffer from high levels of violence stemming from the same roots of colonialism and racial discrimination (Hansen & Dim, 2019). They argue for a comprehensive strategy that benefits all community members (Hansen & Dim, 2019). Additionally, others emphasize that people who identify as 2SLGBTQI+

face unique challenges that deserve recognition and inclusion in any plans or inquiries (The National Inquiry, 2016; Ramnarine, 2023).

Given this context in combination with Indigenous youths' perspectives, the first proposed action is informed advocacy and sustained engagement. More specifically, actionable recommendations involve being aware of the conversations around expanding the focus of the MMIWG movement beyond women and girls, knowing one's reason for either excluding or including men, boys, and people who identify as 2SLGBTQI+, and supporting the movement beyond just a day. It is important for advocates and supporters to understand and contribute to debates on the MMIWG crisis. This means understanding their reasons for supporting specific arguments, ensuring meaningful dialogue. Additionally, advocacy must extend beyond short-term actions, requiring a sustained commitment to making a lasting impact in the fight against violence in Indigenous communities.

Proposed Action 2: Prioritize Raising Public Awareness. Indigenous youth emphasized the need for raising awareness through education, cultural expression, and continuous visibility. They clearly stated the need for awareness efforts to reach global and cross-cultural populations, while acknowledging the lack of awareness within and outside Canada and the problem of counterproductive awareness.

These discussions align with grassroots efforts and research that highlight the necessity of bringing the issue of MMIWG into the global and cross-cultural spotlight to combat the existing gaps in public understanding and engagement (Hansen & Dim, 2019; Richardson et al., 2024; Vanner et al., 2024). For example, researchers point out the significant role that grassroots movements have played in North America in raising awareness of the MMIWG crisis (Richardson et al., 2024). However, there is a lack of literature and unreliable data that creates

barriers to accessing knowledge (Richardson et al., 2024). As such, there continues to be "low public knowledge or interest about the subject outside of Indigenous communities" (Richardson et al., 2024, p.17). Moreover, there is a discrepancy in attention and research regarding MMIWG in Canada due to insufficient media coverage (Hansen & Dim, 2019), and MMIWG issues continue being largely unaddressed in K–12 education (Vanner et al., 2024) - all limiting opportunities for the necessary widespread learning about the crisis.

Given these insights, I recommend that individual advocacy strategies focus on raising public awareness. Strategies could involve incorporating MMIWG education in diverse environments, leveraging cultural expressions to narrate stories and statistics, and maintaining an ongoing presence in media and public discourse. These strategies can help to bridge the informational gaps on an individual level where broader systemic efforts fall short. The use of these strategies would contribute to the MMIWG crisis being recognized globally.

Proposed Action 3: Engage in Constructive Forms of Activism. Indigenous youth detailed particularly powerful approaches to activism during the March. Marching in visible areas, storytelling, chants, music, posters, and symbolic imagery (such as face paint and apparel) were some of the most notable methods used to raise awareness and engage the public. These methods not only highlight the MMIWG crisis but also fostered an environment conducive to the creation of a collective voice which made the movement more impactful and visible.

The importance of these forms of activism is supported by literature. For instance, many Indigenous scholars have highlighted the critical role of storytelling as a form of resistance and education (Flicker et al., 2019). Storytelling is not only a method to preserve and pass on culture and traditional knowledge, but it also acts as a powerful tool for community building and healing (Flicker et al., 2019). Flicker et al. (2019) illustrated how storytelling, specifically digital

storytelling, can be used as a form of activism to reclaim rights to self-determination and challenge colonial narratives. They emphasize that storytelling can be a method for healing and advocacy. By creating and sharing digital stories, Indigenous youth have effectively raised awareness and engaged the public to reframe dialogues on critical issues, while also demonstrating community engagement and cultural pride.

Given the evidence from both this research and the extant literature, engaging in constructive forms of activism is recommended for those looking to support the MMIWG movement. Several impactful actions can be taken, such as participating in storytelling and marches, using chants and symbolism (e.g., face paint), creating posters and signs, and engaging in creative approaches to advocacy such as through art, poetry, and music.

Proposed Action 4: Utilize But Don't Rely on Social Media. In the current study, Indigenous youth talked about social media as a powerful tool for spreading information and rallying support for causes like MMIWG, the reached far beyond the influence of other powerful institutions. It offers a platform not only for broadly increasing awareness but also for engaging in meaningful activism. However, the findings suggest that although social media is effective in reaching a wide audience, there is a need for additional efforts to increase awareness.

These findings highlight the pros and cons of social media which are further supported by existing literature. Studies conducted by Duarte (2017) and Tupper (2014) on the #IdleNoMore movement exemplifies the dual nature of social media in modern activism. Duarte illustrates how social media enhances visibility, fosters solidarity among dispersed individuals, and holds governments accountable, thereby extending the reach of movements. Similarly, Tupper notes that social media rapidly and globally mobilizes support through tools like hashtags, which organize events and build community.

However, both scholars also point out the limitations of relying solely on digital platforms. Duarte emphasizes the need to integrate digital activism with traditional, real-world actions that are sensitive to specific social and political contexts of Indigenous communities. Tupper echoes this, arguing that social media alone cannot address the deep-rooted systemic issues of colonialism and inequality, highlighting the necessity for a comprehensive approach that includes both digital and physical activism for effective and sustained political engagement.

Given the dual nature of social media's impact, I recommend to use social media strategically but not depend solely on it. Instead, effective activism should involve the integration of social media with traditional activism. The powerful use of social media must be complemented with traditional forms of engagement such as community meetings, marches, and direct interactions. As the current findings and the extant literature suggest, social media cannot be used in isolation to fully address systemic issues. Addressing systemic issues requires a holistic approach that involves face-to-face, concrete, and real-world action.

Proposed Action 5: The Government Must Uphold Prior Commitments And Take an Active Role. Indigenous youth discussed the Canadian government's response to the MMIWG crisis. Generally, they felt that the government's responses were limited and mostly consisted of superficial support. These youth expressed a desire for more than rhetorical support and called on government officials to be active in their commitment, including attending MMIWG events, listening to stories shared at MMIWG marches, and engaging in MMIWG events in professional capacities in their roles as government officials as well as on a personal level. In the view of Indigenous youth, this would demonstrate a deeper commitment to addressing the MMIWG crisis and supporting Indigenous communities more generally.

Indigenous youths' views on the government's responses to the MMIWG crisis are consistent with recent literature on the topic. For example, Sherman (2022) assessed the Canadian government's progress in ending the MMIWG crisis after the 2016 National Inquiry was launched to investigate the crisis under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's regime. This included an assessment as to whether the Canadian government has actioned the 231 "Calls for Justice" outlined in the Final Report of the National Inquiry published on June 3, 2019. As of 2022, it was found that the Canadian government's progress was insufficient and that the government "...has been using the [COVID-19] pandemic as an excuse to stall taking action on the Calls for Justice" (Sherman, 2022, p. 12). Sherman also revealed that the Calls for Justice were not legally binding obligations on the Canadian government, noting the widespread concern that no meaningful progress will be taken by the government until legally binding obligations are imposed on them.

The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) has been similarly critical of the Canadian government's progress on its response to the MMIWG crisis. The NWAC is a national Indigenous organization that seeks to promote the social, economic, cultural, and political well-being of Indigenous Women, Girls, and Indigenous people who identify as Two-Spirited, Transgender, and Gender-Diverse+ (WG2STGD+) across Turtle Island and Inuit Nunangat. In a 2022-23 Annual Report, the NWAC evaluated and reported on the Canadian government's progress on its commitments to end the MMIWG crisis, including the Canadian government's implementation of the Calls for Justice, over the prior year. Overall, the NWAC found that the Canadian government had made "...slight progress compared to last year" but gave the Canadian government a failing grade, due to an overwhelming lack of meaningful action, absence of transparency and accountability mechanisms, and the worsening state of the MMIWG crisis.

Specifically related to lack of transparency and accountability, the NWAC was critical of the Canadian government's funding programs and how the lack of clarity regarding the amount of funding that was actually making its way into Indigenous communities. In closing, the NWAC made the following plea to the Canadian government to take action: (NWAC, 2023, p. 48)

> We demand that the government finally take action that matches the severity of this ongoing genocide, by acting upon the legal imperatives outlined by the National Inquiry into MMIWG and fulfilling their national and international human rights obligations of fully implementing the 231 Calls for Justice, upholding the inherent rights of Indigenous WG2STGD+ Peoples and ending the MMIWG2S+ genocide. Canada is at a crisis point as violence against Indigenous WG2STGD+ Peoples continues at a disproportionate rate. We call upon the federal government to declare a national state of emergency and immediately implement a public alert system for MMIWG2S+.

In context of these reviews, it makes sense that the Indigenous youth in this study called for the government to take a more active role in responding to the crisis. Although there does not appear to be a legally binding obligation for the government to take this action, the Canadian government has made specific commitments to address the crisis, including meaningful response to the 231 Calls for Justice. Government officials now need to walk-the-talk rather than simply offering arguably superficial support to the issue. Actions that can be taken include requiring government officials to fulfill its prior commitments to combatting the MMIWG crisis, including actioning the 231 Calls to Justice, as well as actively participating in MMIWG events, incorporating their learnings into policymaking, and demonstrating a commitment through ongoing community support and resource allocation. This engagement should go beyond formal

appearances and delve into meaningful collaborations with Indigenous communities to craft policies that address the root causes of the crisis.

Proposed Action 6: Inclusive Educational Practices in Alberta. Indigenous youth highlighted the key role the educational system could play in educating young generations about the MMIWG crisis. They noted a lack of Indigenous inclusion in school curricula, which fails to adequately address the specific historical and cultural contexts of Indigenous peoples. These findings align with current debates regarding education and curriculum. In Alberta, criticism has arisen regarding the proposed K-6 curriculum including both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. The Confederacy of Treaty No. 6 First Nations Chiefs (2021) have rejected the draft K-6 education curriculum proposed by the provincial government:

> The Confederacy of Treaty No. 6 Chiefs are concerned with the draft K-6 Education Curriculum expected to be tabled by Provincial Education Minister Adriana LaGrange. What was anticipated to be an opportunity to tell future generations of Albertans about the fulsome and diverse history of this province, including the histories of Treaty First Nations that have existed here since time immemorial, has instead devolved into a Eurocentric, American-focused, Christian-dominant narrative that perpetuates rather than addresses systemic racism and falls far short of providing a balanced, nuanced perspective on Treaty 6 First Nations history and culture.

In addition, the Métis Nation of Alberta (2021) called for a re-draft of K-6 curriculum by stating the "curriculum carries a Eurocentric-American point of view that effectively eliminates the voice and history of the Métis Peoples in Alberta" (para. 2). Although some scholars have expressed that education regarding residential schools in various provincial curricula has been

enhanced following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report (Vanner et al., 2024), this does not seem to be the reality for Alberta.

Even less attention has been given to the National Inquiry's findings within educational frameworks, such as curriculum and training (Vanner et al., 2024). Research by Vanner and colleges (2024) revealed that the ongoing issue of MMIWG "remains largely unaddressed in K–12 education". Educators have expressed frustration over the exclusion of MMIWG content in the curriculum and learning materials (Vanner et al., 2024). Many also face challenges related to the sensitivity of the topic and the general unfamiliarity students have with it, which requires more time and resources than are typically allocated (Vanner et al., 2024). Although there are educational guidelines like "Their Voices Will Guide Us" that advise incorporating Indigenous voices in the classroom, more needs to be done in this area (Bearhead, 2020; Vanner et al., 2024).

To foster a more inclusive and accurate portrayal of Indigenous histories in Alberta's education system, I propose several critical required actions. Firstly, I take the position that a comprehensive curriculum overhaul is necessary, involving a thorough review and revision of the K-6 curriculum to include a balanced and inclusive representation of Indigenous cultures and histories. This should extend beyond the currently criticized Eurocentric and American-focused narratives to incorporate a diverse range of perspectives from Treaty First Nations and the Métis Peoples in Alberta. Secondly, the findings of the National Inquiry into MMIWG should be integrated into the K-12 curriculum through the development of specific educational modules that are both age-appropriate and reflective of the real issues. Enhanced teacher training is also essential, requiring mandatory education for teachers on Indigenous histories, cultures, and contemporary issues, including sensitive topics like the MMIWG crisis. This training should

prepare teachers to discuss these issues comprehensively and respectfully with students. The inclusion of Indigenous voices in the curriculum is advised, which can include regular interactions with Indigenous leaders and community members, providing authentic insights and perspectives. Lastly, a monitoring and evaluation process should be established to assess the effectiveness of these curricular changes, involving feedback from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators, communities, and students to ensure an impactful learning experience.

Proposed Action 7: Seeking Further Transparency and Accountability from the Justice System. Indigenous youth were critical of the justice system and raised concerns that it was not adequately responding to the MMIWG crisis, including the utter lack of transparency in the investigation of MMIWG and the prosecution of the perpetrators. To address this concern, the youth proposed that the justice system implement additional measures to ensure it promotes a transparent and accountable system, especially as it related to law enforcement.

To say that Indigenous communities have a healthy skepticism with the Canadian justice system and its response to the MMIWG crisis is an understatement. According to Sherman (2022), Canadian police departments are unfortunately known by Indigenous communities for dismissing missing persons cases. The Final Report of the National Inquiry (2019) referenced a 2014 study by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), which reported 1,017 homicides and 164 disappearances (1,181 total) of Indigenous women and girls in Canada between 1980 and 2012. However, this report itself, as noted in Volume 1b of the Final Report (2019), raised serious concerns regarding the accuracy and completeness of the data. The RCMP admitted that their figures were unreliable and that the actual figures could well be many times higher. Furthermore, Draper (2022) noted that various Indigenous women's groups have documented

over 4,000 MMIWG throughout Canada between 1980 and 2012, giving credence to the notion that a significant number of MMIWG cases have not been investigated and gone unreported.

In their 2022-23 Annual Report, the NWAC assessed the Canadian government's progress on their development of a national Indigenous human rights accountability mechanism focused on inherent, Treaty, and Constitutional rights. Two of the short-term priorities in achieving this goal included implementing Calls to Justice 9.9-9.10, aimed at creating a national task force to review and re-investigate unresolved MMIWG files and relying on police services to provide unresolved MMIWG cases to this task force (NWAC, 2023, p. 33). However, as of the 2022-23 Annual Report, the NWAC noted that a national task force to review and re-investigate unresolved files of MMIWG had *not* yet been established. This is despite the June 2019 publication of the Final Report on the National Inquiry, which outlined the 231 Calls for Justice. Without this national task force, the NWAC (2023) raised concerns that families of MMIWG will continue to go without answers or justice for their missing or murdered loved ones. Overall, the justice system has demonstrated a continued lack of accountability in investigating MMIWG cases and a disinterest in being transparent with families affected by the MMIWG crisis.

In light of the above, the Indigenous youths' request for a more transparent and accountable justice system is reasonable and necessary. As a starting point, the relevant Calls for Justice need to be actioned in a reasonable time period, including implementing a national task force through Calls for Justice 9.9-9.10. Additionally, Canadian police departments could implement courses and training to become educated about MMIWG and how to appropriately investigate MMIWG cases. Canadian police departments could also consider implementing

further transparency measures to provide Indigenous families with accessible and up-to-date information concerning ongoing and unresolved MMIWG cases.

Proposed Action 8: Increase Access to Cultural Resources within Urban Spaces.
Indigenous youth detailed how historical policies and ongoing discriminatory practices, such as those related to residential schools, have perpetuated trauma and cultural dislocation among Indigenous peoples. Personal stories revealed the deep, enduring pain caused by such policies, with discussions about the theft of Indigenous lands and the barriers to practicing and maintaining cultural traditions. They described challenges such as the lack of ceremonial facilities and transportation barriers to accessing cultural events, which are a result of colonization.

Abundant literature reflects the reality of the challenges faced by Indigenous peoples in urban areas. For instance, Indigenous peoples living in urban areas have less access to cultural, social, and health resources given that urban areas often lack the cultural grounding of Indigenous communities (Weaver, 2012). The historical and ongoing impacts of colonization exacerbate inequities and resource inadequacies in urban settings (Ball & Benoit-Jansson, 2023). Urban design and spatial planning also contribute to the displacement and marginalization of Indigenous communities within cities, leading to their exclusion from vital cultural and economic opportunities (Nejad et al., 2019). Moreover, Indigenous peoples living in cities are frequently confined to marginalized neighborhoods, further limiting their access to necessary cultural resources (Wall, 2016).

Despite Indigenous peoples needing access to cultural and other support in urban centers, this rarely occurs in Canada due to insufficient funding and resources (Ball & Benoit-Jansson, 2023). As a result, Indigenous individuals often find themselves disconnected from crucial

health, social, and cultural supports (Weaver, 2012), making it difficult to maintain connections with their traditional practices and communities. This includes major urban centers like Edmonton, which is poised to become the city with the largest urban Indigenous population in Canada (Wall, 2016). This urban dynamic forces many Indigenous people to become "boundary-spanners" or "edge-walkers", constantly negotiating their existence between their cultural heritage and urban lifestyles, often necessitating travel to participate in cultural ceremonies (Carli et al., 2012). This reality underscores an urgent need for cities to better accommodate the cultural and social needs of Indigenous peoples, highlighting a critical area for policy development and urban planning.

Given the challenges Indigenous peoples face in urban areas, as highlighted by Indigenous youth and reflected in the extant literature, I recommend action around improving the accessibility and quality of cultural resources for urban Indigenous communities, especially youth. Developing and maintaining cultural facilities within urban areas would provide stable and accessible venues for cultural practices and gatherings, helping to bridge the gap experienced by Indigenous peoples living away from their communities. For example, building on initiatives like kihcihkaw askî-Sacred Land, Canada's first urban Indigenous ceremonial grounds in Edmonton, could serve as a model for other cities (Amato, 2023). Furthermore, these actions should be complemented by broader systemic changes. This includes policy adjustments that acknowledge and actively incorporate the needs of urban Indigenous populations into city planning and development processes. By prioritizing the creation of culturally relevant spaces and ensuring that these areas are well-connected by public infrastructure, urban centers can significantly enhance the quality of life and cultural continuity for Indigenous residents.

Proposed Action 9: Targeting Societal Engagement through Media. In the current study, Indigenous youth explored how societal attitudes and structures have marginalized Indigenous communities, contributing to historical and ongoing injustices. They emphasized the public's responsibility to actively engage with and support the MMIWG movement. They called for broader societal involvement to ensure that Indigenous voices are heard and respected, highlighting a widespread feeling of uncertainty about when meaningful resolution or recognition will occur. Their discussions reflected concerns about the potential for the MMIWG crisis to be forgotten and the need for persistent and widespread societal support to bring about lasting change.

Findings from the current study regarding the marginalization of Indigenous communities and the need for societal engagement align closely with literature about social denial. Cohen (2001) described social denial as a collective societal process where people "seem apathetic, passive, indifferent and unresponsive" (p. 21) towards public events or issues. As such, uncomfortable truths are often ignored or rationalized away through normalization, defense mechanisms, and rhetorical devices (Bychutsky, 2017). This aligns with the observed societal reluctance to fully address the MMIWG crisis, as described by participants in the current study.

Moreover, scholars have highlighted how "active inaction", or the deliberate choice not to act, plays a critical role in the perpetuation of social denial (Bychutsky, 2017; Seu, 2013). This form of denial, ingrained as a social practice, manifests through bystanders' who justify their non-responsiveness to significant issues, such as those facing Indigenous communities (Bychutsky, 2017; Seu, 2013). The Indigenous youth in this study made clear that denial and inaction are unacceptable and that social practices of denial contribute to the marginalization of Indigenous communities and the neglect of the MMIWG crisis.

Researchers have noted that public engagement and responsibility in supporting MMIWG movements this can be achieved with "bearing witness", the antidote to social denial (Bychutsky, 2017). Bearing witness takes a combative stance against denial by using "voice against silence, interpretation against incomprehension, empathy against indifference, remembrance against forgetting, and prevention against repetition" (Kurasawa, 2007, p.25). Essentially, bearing witness challenges the mechanisms of social denial by ensuring that the stories of marginalized groups, such as MMIWG, are heard and integrated into public discourse, thereby contesting the perpetuation of silence and inaction in society (Bychutsky, 2017). One way bearing witness can be achieved is through the media (Bychutsky, 2017).

Findings from the current study and existing research on social denial converge to suggest the imperative that societal engagement and education be prioritized to effectively address the MMIWG crisis. Bearing witness, which involves actively countering social denial by elevating Indigenous voices and stories, is a promising approach. This strategy emphasizes fostering a public discourse centered on understanding, empathy, and remembrance to combat the neglect and marginalization of systemic issues facing Indigenous peoples. More specifically, enhancing media responsibility through journalist training and supporting media advocacy groups can promote practices that support bearing witness by ensuring responsible and respectful reporting.

Contributions of the Current Study

This study makes several contributions to existing literature and has implications for practice. First, the research focused on the inclusion of Indigenous youths' perspectives. By centering Indigenous youths' voices the current research addresses a significant gap in existing literature where these youths' experiences are often excluded. Meaningfully involving youth in

research not only enriches the research process but also ensures that outcomes and recommendations accurately reflect their perspectives, needs, and hopes.

Second, the current study used a community-based participatory approach by actively engaging with the community through a partnership with ICHS. This collaboration ensured that the research was grounded in the real-life context of those who it aimed to benefit. For example, deriving the research questions directly from the community was one way this approach was achieved. Together these engaged practices enhanced the relevance and applicability of the findings.

Third, the research was guided by Indigenous methodologies. Considering the topic and participants, this was extremely important in order to maintain a strong commitment to cultural sensitivity and reflexivity, which helped to ensure the integrity and respectfulness of the research process.

Fourth, instead of focusing solely on deficits, the study highlights resilience and healing within Indigenous communities. This strength-based focus is vital for empowering both participants and communities.

Fifth, the use of qualitative methods allows for a deep, nuanced understanding of the experiences and perceptions of Indigenous youth. A qualitative approach can be particularly effective in exploring complex social issues and capturing the subtleties of personal and collective experiences. This is especially important as this was the first known study to explore Indigenous youth's perspectives regarding the MMIWG crisis and how they were impacted by the MMIWG March.

Lastly, by discussing potential actions and policy changes, the research extends beyond academia to suggest practical applications that can impact the lives of Indigenous peoples, both

generally and specific to the MMIWG crisis. This connection of research findings to real-world applications is made explicit throughout the proposed actions outlined above.

Limitations

This study also has several limitations. Although inherent to this form of research and not considered a limitation, the reader must be aware that the findings from the study, which focused on a specific and small group of Indigenous youth at ICHS in Edmonton, are not intended to be generalized across all Indigenous populations. The unique experiences and cultural ties of each participant mean that results may not apply universally. This not only highlights the diversity within Indigenous communities but also the caution of pan-Indigenizing, which can involve assuming that all Indigenous peoples share the same experiences, needs, and cultural practices. Such assumptions can erase the distinctiveness of different communities and overlook the nuances that are critical to understanding their specific challenges and strengths. As such, caution and care are warranted in the interpretation of how individual experiences reflect broader phenomena.

One limitation is that although I was guided by Indigenous methodologies (IM) in this research, I did not fully embrace these practices. This limitation is rooted in my own background and the constraints it imposes on my understanding of Indigenous traditions and culture. My academic training, which includes both an undergraduate and master's degree in psychology, has been primarily grounded in Western teachings. As a result, my framing of the results naturally centered around the psychological impacts of the March, focusing on protective factors and trauma. This approach aligns with the Western perspectives that have shaped my education, but it also means that my ability to integrate IM was limited. A more comprehensive integration of

IM could potentially deepen the insights and enhance the relevance of the findings to the communities involved.

In reflecting on how others might approach this differently, I recognize that an Indigenous researcher with a deeper connection to their culture and with a different lens then mine might have co-created knowledge differently. For example, I considered using the medicine wheel as a framework. However, I was conscious of my limited knowledge and immersion in Indigenous culture, which made it challenging to authentically incorporate or co-create knowledge through this lens. This gap in my understanding likely influenced this research, possibly leading to a lack of cultural and spiritual depth in the findings. Given this, I cannot help but ponder the potential richness of knowledge that could have been co-created by an Indigenous researcher more deeply connected to their culture. A researcher who can offer a more decolonized approach would impact the entire research process, so that the knowledge created was more spiritually enriched and relevant to the Indigenous communities involved.

Finally, conducting this research within a colonial academic institution imposed challenges, particularly in terms of aligning the research methods and outcomes with Indigenous values and practices. One of the most substantial constraints imposed was time. As a master's student in a professional psychology program, we are encouraged to complete our thesis within two years, with a maximum of three years. However, when engaging in community-based Indigenous research, this timeframe is notably restrictive and can limit various crucial aspects of the research process. Time constraints can limit the depth of the relationship between the researcher and the community, which is fundamental to Indigenous research methodologies. These relationships require time to build trust, mutual respect, and a true understanding of the community's needs and values, which cannot be rushed. Furthermore, these constraints can

restrict the level and type of community engagement, leading to less meaningful involvement from the community throughout the research process. This limitation can also affect the amount of reflection necessary to honor and fully interpret the knowledge shared, potentially leading to a less comprehensive understanding of the findings.

Knowing that time would be a challenge, I still chose to work within these constraints. This was possible because I am choosing to continue this work into my doctoral degree. I also had a pre-existing relationship with my community partner, which helped make the process more feasible. Additionally, I was fortunate to have a research champion, Charis Auger, who played a pivotal role in facilitating the project and establishing the foundational relationships and trust essential for Indigenous research. Moreover, the flexibility of both my community partner and myself allowed us to adapt to challenges as they arose, such as rescheduling when certain aspects of the research process did not go as planned. However, despite these efforts, the constraints likely affected the depth and nature of engagement with Indigenous peoples and topics.

Despite it being possible for students to conduct community-based Indigenous research within the constraints of colonial academic institutions, this often comes at the cost of compromising the depth and authenticity of the research process. This should not be the standard nor the expectation. There needs to be a broader change in how the academic journey is viewed, particularly in relation to Indigenous research. The expectation that a master's thesis be completed in two years should be less rigid. No shame or logistical barriers should be tied to extending a degree. Some aspects of research, especially those involving community relationships and learning, cannot and should not be rushed. Additionally, Western education systems need to incorporate Indigenous research methodologies into their courses, including what Indigenous research requires from their researchers. Understanding the complexities and

challenges of starting such a project requires prior knowledge, self-awareness, and a commitment to criticality and growth, which should be fostered throughout the educational journey, and all of which may fail to align with the two-year thesis completion standard.

Future Research

The findings from this study not only shed light on the immediate impacts of and responses to the MMIWG crisis but also open avenues for future research. First, future research could explore the MMIWG March as a transformative intervention that impacts the wellbeing of Indigenous youth and their broader communities. Such exploration could analyze its effectiveness in fostering nation-building, enhancing personal growth, and facilitating post-traumatic growth among March participants. By identifying and understanding the key components that contribute to the success of the March, such as community and cultural support, researchers can offer insights into how similar interventions might be replicated or adapted in different contexts or among different communities.

Second, future researchers could employ a variety of methodological approaches to comprehensively evaluate the outcomes associated with the MMIWG March and related interventions. Longitudinal studies could be particularly impactful, providing insights into the sustained effects of the March on participants' personal and communal lives over time. Additionally, comparative studies could be conducted to evaluate the applicability and effectiveness of the MMIWG March model in diverse Indigenous settings, thereby assessing its potential for broader application. Efforts could also include quantitative research, such as using repeated measures to examine the process of healing before, during, after, and well after the March. This approach could lead to better understanding as to how the intervention influences

individual and communal healing trajectories, while also looking at the long-term impacts of the March.

Finally, with my delineation of several actionable responses to the MMIWG crisis, each proposal opens up substantial opportunities for future research. Future studies could explore optimal approaches for implementing educational reforms, enhancing transparency in the justice system, ensuring government accountability, and expanding cultural resources in urban settings for Indigenous communities. Such research would not only support the recommendations presented in this thesis but also refine these strategies for more impactful advocacy and implementation.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

For those of you who are still reading, thank you for your engagement. Beyond the scope of this thesis lies a broader, urgent challenge: to bridge the gap between research and systemic change. Researchers must not only seek to understand but also to transform, ensuring that our findings lead to real, enduring change. In this moment, I hope our work can become a guide for action, ensuring that the voices of the MMIWG crisis are not just heard but play a part in shaping a future of justice and equity. We must move beyond mere academic pursuits towards our moral imperative to mend systemic issues for the betterment of all members of society.

With that said, I would like to conclude this thesis by amplifying the voices of the Indigenous youth who participated in this study. While the following question was not part of my predetermined questions, "Is there anything you would like people to know when they read about the study?", I added it last minute. My foundational and central intention in this research was to provide a platform for these youths' voices. Their insights and perspectives are vital, giving depth and authenticity to the discourse around the MMIWG crisis. One participant's response strongly captures the essence of resilience and community support, principles that have driven this research:

> Personally, I would give advice to people and messages. I say stay strong regardless of what you go through. You're not alone. And there's a million people that go through the same thing you are too. Don't trap yourself in it. Talk to people. Go on a phone call. Write it down. Stuff like that. Don't trap it in your brain. Keep yourself strong. Keep yourself potent. And if you need to connect with the earth, connect in ways like those events [March]. If you see a Native person, you know, talk to him too. If you see somebody going down or whatever and you feel down, talk to that person. Cause maybe

you guys can live on the same thing, right? I just always say, stay strong, you're not alone.

The love and care in this message shines through, highlighting how Indigenous youth are not only resilient but truly inspiring. Their words reflect a profound understanding of strength in unity and the power of community support. As this thesis closes, let us carry forward this message of strength and unity, ensuring that the voices of Indigenous youth continue to guide and inform our actions and policies. It is through listening deeply and responding genuinely that we can hope to foster environments of understanding, support, and meaningful change. The spirits and hopeful outlooks of Indigenous youth urge us to keep pushing for a world where their voices lead the way in healing and justice.

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Appendix A: Information Letter and Consent form for Participants

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: Exploring the Effects of Activism: Promoting Indigenous Youth's Voices.

Contact Information

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Email: mkd@ualberta.ca

You are being invited to take part in a research study. This research study will form part of

Jasmine Kowalewski's master's thesis. Before you take part, a member of the study team is

available to explain the project and you are free to ask any questions about anything you do not

understand. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You are being asked to be in this study because your perspective matters. Especially when it comes to topics that involve you and your community. The topic of this study is on the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's and Girls (MMIWG) crisis. The purpose of this research is to listen and learn about your opinion on the MMIWG crisis and the MMIWG March.

What is the reason for doing the study?

Youth's voices are often left out of research. This means that we are missing important information. Your school was asked to take part in this research because students at your school have valuable information to share. This research aims to empower youth (like you!) to voice your opinions and take action on issues that impact them.

What will I be asked to do?

After you go on your school field trip to the MMIWG March, you are being invited to take part in a group discussion which will resemble an Indigenous sharing circle. This group discussion will be held at Inner City High School. The group will contain two researchers from the University of Alberta, other fellow students, a staff member from Inner City High School, and the School Elder.

During the group discussion, you will be asked to share your opinion about the MMIWG crisis and March. You may contribute as much or as little as you like during this group discussion. The discussions will be audio recorded and transcribed word-for-word by our research team.

If you would like a copy of the transcript emailed to you to check for accuracy, you can let us know at the end of the meeting. You will have the opportunity to make changes to your comments. These changes must be completed within two weeks. After two weeks, it will no longer be possible to make changes to your transcripts. Transcripts will be stored securely. Once the transcription is complete, all identifying information will be removed.

The length of the focus group will last around 1-2 hours. There will be a break at the halfway mark. During the break, we will serve drinks and snacks. We ask that you follow all Covid-19 protocols outlined by Inner City High School, as we are meeting in person.

What are the risks and discomforts?

You are unlikely to experience risks or discomforts by taking part in this research. As a part of the group discussion, your opinions and ideas may become known to other participants, so you are invited to contribute as much or as little as you like. In addition, topics that will be discussed during the group discussion may bring up emotion. If at any point you are feeling overwhelmed, you can stop participating in the group discussion. Depending on your needs, you can take a break or discontinue the study. If you are experiencing psychological distress, we can refer to onsite staff and provide mental health resources. It is not possible to know all the risks that may

happen in a study. However, the researchers have taken all reasonable safeguards to minimize any known risks to participants.

What are the benefits to me?

While there may not be any direct benefit to you, results from this study will help us learn more about your perspective on gendered violence. The result from this study will also help us discover the possible impacts of attending the MMIWG March. One potential benefit to you is that sharing personal experiences will strengthen your relationship with your school community and contribute to a sense of belonging. Participating in activism (i.e., MMIWG March) may also be an empowering and meaningful experience.

Do I have to take part in the study?

Being in this study is your choice. If you decide to be in the study, you can change your mind and stop being in the study at any point prior to or during the group discussion. After that point, we cannot remove you from the study. This is because the data must be kept in full so we can understand the group discussion. To withdraw from the study please contact Jasmine Kowalewski (jkowalew@ualberta.ca) or her supervisor Melissa Tremblay (mkd@ualberta.ca). Alternatively, you can let Jasmine Kowalewski know in person, prior to or during the group discussion.

Will I be paid to be in the research?

At the focus group, you will be served drinks and light snacks. In addition, you will receive a 10$ gift card for participating in this study. If you leave the focus group or withdraw your participation before the study is finished, you are still entitled to the gift card.

Will my information be kept private?

During this study we will do everything we can to make sure that all information you provide is kept private. No information relating to this study that includes your name will be released outside of the researcher's office or published by the researchers unless you give us your express permission. Sometimes, by law, we may have to release your information with your name so we cannot guarantee absolute privacy. However, we will make every legal effort to make sure that your information is kept private.

Because this study will involve a group discussion, please be aware that what you say will be heard by others in the group. To provide you with the opportunity to revise your comments in the transcription, your name and contact information with be recorded. Once the transcription has been reviewed and is complete, all identifying information will be removed.

During analysis, electronic data will be stored on a secure Google drive at the University of Alberta. When not in use, paper copies of data will be kept in locked cabinets in the Community-Based Action Research and Evaluation Lab. The information from this study will be seen only by members of the research group. At the University of Alberta, we keep data stored for a

minimum of 5 years after the end of the study. On occasion, this data will need to be checked for accuracy. For this reason, your data, including your name, may also be looked at by people from the Research Ethics Board.

What if I have questions?

If you have any questions about the research now or later, please contact Jasmine Kowalewski (jkowalew@ualberta.ca) or her supervisor Melissa Tremblay (mkd@ualberta.ca).

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office at reoffice@ualberta.ca or 780-492-2615 and quote Ethics ID Pro00128067. This office is independent of the study investigators.

How do I indicate my agreement to be in this study?

By signing below, you understand:

- · That you have read the above information and have had anything that you do not understand explained to you to your satisfaction.
- · That you will be taking part in a research study.
- · That you may freely leave the research study at any time.

·   That you do not waive your legal rights by being in the study

·   That the legal and professional obligations of the investigators and involved

    institutions   are not changed by your taking part in this study.

SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

_____   Pseudonym (if necessary)

Name of Participant

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

Appendix B: Information Letter and Consent form for Staff

STAFF CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: Exploring the Effects of Activism: Promoting Indigenous Youth's Voices.

Contact Information

Co-Investigator:

Jasmine Kowalewski, MEd student, School and Clinical Child Psychology Program, University

of Alberta

Email: jkowalewski@ualberta.ca

Principal Investigator:

Dr. Melissa Tremblay, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education

Email: mkd@ualberta.ca

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What is the study?

Youth's voices are often left out of research. This means that we are missing important information. You were asked to take part in this research because students at your school have valuable information to share. This research aims to empower youth to voice your opinions and take action on issues that impact them.

What are we asking you to do?

After you go on your school field trip to the MMIWG March, you are being invited to take part in an interview. This interview will be held in-person at Inner City High School. However, if you prefer to meet online (e.g., Zoom) we can accommodate. The interview will contain a researcher from the University of Alberta. During the interview discussion, you will be asked to share your opinion about the MMIWG crisis and March. You may contribute as much or as little as you like during this interview. The discussions will be audio recorded and transcribed word-for-word by our research team.

If you would like a copy of the transcript emailed to you to check for accuracy, you can let us know at the end of the interview. You will have the opportunity to make changes to your comments. These changes must be completed within two weeks. After two weeks, it will no longer be possible to make changes to your transcripts. Transcripts will be stored securely. Once the transcription is complete, all identifying information will be removed. Afterward, you will be provided with a summary of findings at which point your feedback and any additional information you wish to share will be welcomed.

The length of the interview group will last around 1hour. Breaks can be taken during the interview. If you need a break at point, please let the researcher know. In addition, we ask that you follow all Covid-19 protocols outlined by Inner City High School, if we meet in person.

What are the risks and benefits of participating?

You are unlikely to experience risks or discomforts by taking part in this research. Topics that will be discussed during the interview may bring up emotion. If at any point you are feeling overwhelmed, you can stop participating in the interview. Depending on your needs, you can take a break or discontinue the study. If you are experiencing psychological distress, we can provide you with a list of resources. It is not possible to know all the risks that may happen in a study. However, the researchers have taken all reasonable safeguards to minimize any known risks to participants.

While there may not be any direct benefit to you, results from this study will help us learn more about Indigenous perspectives on gendered violence. The result from this study will also help us discover the possible impacts of attending the MMIWG March. One potential benefit to you is that sharing personal experiences can be liberating, empowering, and contribute to a sense of belonging. Participating in activism (i.e., MMIWG March) may also be an empowering and meaningful experience.

Do I have to take part in the study?

Being in this study is your choice. If you decide to be in the study, you can change your mind and stop being in the study at any point prior to or during the interview. After data analysis is commenced, you will no longer be able to withdraw. It will be difficult to separate your data from the rest because all the data will be interpreted collectively. To withdraw from the study please contact Jasmine Kowalewski (jkowalew@ualberta.ca) or Melissa Tremblay (mkd@ualberta.ca). Alternatively, you can let Jasmine Kowalewski know in person, prior to or during the interview.

Will I be paid to be in the research?

At the interview, you will receive a 10$ gift card for participating in this study. If you leave the interview or withdraw your participation before the study is finished, you are still entitled to the gift card.

How will we protect your privacy?

During this study we will do everything we can to make sure that all information you provide is kept private. No information relating to this study that includes your name will be released outside of the researcher's office or published by the researchers unless you give us your express permission. Sometimes, by law, we may have to release your information with your name so we cannot guarantee absolute privacy. However, we will make every legal effort to make sure that your information is kept private.

To provide you with the opportunity to revise your comments in the transcription, your name and contact information with be recorded. Once the transcription has been reviewed and is complete, all identifying information will be removed.

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- That you will be taking part in a research study.
- That you may freely leave the research study at any time.
- That you do not waive your legal rights by being in the study
- That the legal and professional obligations of the investigators and involved institutions   are not changed by your taking part in this study.

SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

_____   Pseudonym (if necessary)

Name of Participant

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

Appendix C: List of Free and Low-Cost Counselling

List of Low-Cost or Free Counselling Services in the Edmonton Area

 Addiction and Mental Health Line:

1-877-303-2642 OR in Edmonton 780-424-2424

Canadian Mental Health Association Distress Line:

780-482-4357

Cornerstone Counselling (offers sliding scale fees and low-cost sessions provided by students)

www.cornerstonecounselling.com

780-482-6215

Free Drop-in Single Session Counselling:

https://www.dropinyeg.ca/

780.423.2831

Jewish Family Services (offers services on a sliding scale; do not have to be Jewish to access counselling)

780-454-1194

www.jfse.org

Momentum Walk-In Counselling (Free)

www.momentumcounselling.org

780-757-0900

Appendix D: Group Discussion Outline

Focus Group and Interview Questions

Research Question 1: First, what are the perspectives of Canadian Indigenous youth with respect to actions that can be taken in response to the MMIWG crisis?

1. What is your understanding of the MMIWG crisis?

    a. How would you describe the MMIWG crisis to someone who knew nothing about it?

2. What kinds of actions have you seen being taken either in or outside of your school in response to the MMIWG crisis?

    a. What actions do you see as the most helpful? Why?

    b. What actions do you see as the least helpful? Why?

3. What are some of your concerns about the actions being taken in response to the MMIWG crisis?

4. What are some of your hopes regarding the actions being taken in response to the MMIWG crisis?

5. Who should or should not be involved in the MMIWG movement?

6. What are some alternative actions you want to see in response to the MMIWG crisis?

    a. What would make you feel safe, heard, empowered, and supported?

Research Questions 2: Second, how can attending the MMIWG March affect Canadian Indigenous youth?

1. What did you enjoy or dislike about the MMIWG march?

2. What are things you did to prepare for the MMIWG march?

   a. Physically or emotionally?

3. How have your personal life experiences influenced your participation in the march?

4. What are some feelings that arose during the MMIWG march?

   a. Good, bad, mixed feeling?

5. What impact did the MMIWG march have on feelings of connection?

   a. Spiritual or community connection?

6. How did your spirituality and culture play a role during the MMIWG march?

   a. Did you feel safe, free, and proud to express your spirituality and culture?

7. How did the MMIWG honour your loved ones?

8. What did you learn about yourself or your community by engaging in the march?

9. How did engaging in the MMIWG march challenge yourself? Did you go outside your comfort zone?

   a. Did you engage in chants? Did you speak in front of people?

10. After the march was over, how were you feeling?

    a. Good, bad, mixed?

    b. Did you need support after the march? Did you feel supported?

    c. Did these feeling differ from your feelings before engaging in the march?

11. What impact did the MMIWG march have on you?

    a. Was this an impact that is short-lived or lasting?