Urban Indigenous Identity Development in Survivors of the Child Welfare System

by

Kelsey Erin Reed

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In

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Abstract

This study examined the experiences of identity development in urban Indigenous survivors of the Child Welfare System, the ways in which their Indigenous identity developed, and how they did/did not feel supported. In this study I interviewed three Indigenous women who were involved with the Child Welfare System throughout their childhood and/or adolescence in Edmonton, Alberta. Using an Indigenous Research Methodology, I approached this study from an Indigenous paradigm. Grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing and being, this study included cultural protocol and ceremony to honour the voices of the participants. The data was collected through three semi-structured interviews with each participant. The interviews revealed that our existing policies in the Child Welfare System, specifically the policies and practices around apprehension, separation of sibling groups, and forced transition to Semi-Independent Living programs are negatively impacting Indigenous identity development of children in care. Furthermore, the non-Indigenous placements lacked cultural mirrors, the participants experienced constant displacement, and were given direct and indirect negative messaging about Indigenous peoples. Participants spoke about reconnecting to their Indigenous identity and the value of having connection with other Indigenous peoples. These findings indicate the need for policy reform in the Child Welfare System, the recruitment and retention of Indigenous Child and Youth Care Practitioners, and investment into family reunification.

PREFACE

This thesis is an original work by Kelsey Reed. This research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name: "Urban Indigenous Identity Development in Survivors of the Child Welfare System," Pro00103661, 01/29/2021. No part of this thesis has been previously published.

Acknowledgements

In completing this dissertation, I am reminded of the many individuals who have supported me throughout this journey. I am grateful for the sacrifices of my ancestor's and Indigenous scholars have made to pave the way for me to come through this process as an Indigenous woman. Without all of you, this dissertation would not exist.

I want to thank my family for supporting me and loving me through each step of this process. To my parents Wendy and Randy Reed, who have spent thousands of hours listening, caring, and encouraging me to keep going. To my wife Mona, and my two kids Jordyn and Indie, who loved me through the process even when we did not know where this was all going. And to my Kokum Nancy Pederson, thank you for your never-ending support.

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I want to acknowledge my stellar committee; Dr. Evelyn Steinhauer, Dr. Patsy Steinhauer, Dr. Trudy Cardinal, Dr. Sean Lessard, Dr. Michael Hart, and Dr. Janice Huber. I have so much love and respect for all of you. You each brought your gifts, kindness, and laugher to this process and I cannot thank you enough.

To my siblings Ashley Sykes and Chris Reed, and my close friends Mary Pinkoski and Shemine Gulamhusein for your support over the years. I also want to recognize Roxanne Tootoosis and Catherine Hedlin, both strong woman who supported me endlessly and were never able to see me finish.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the courage of the participants of this study. Thank you for sharing your life experiences for our hope of making change for the future Indigenous children and youth in care.

I want to acknowledge and thank Beardy's and Okemasis' Cree Nation for all their support through my academic journey.
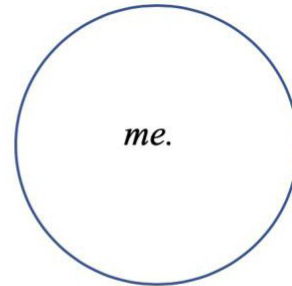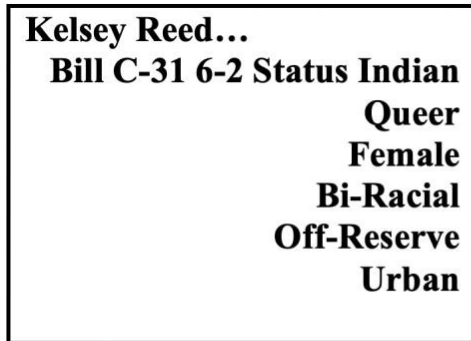
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Chapter 1: Introduction

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me.

Indigenous youth are in a state of crisis. While this may be a bold way to begin, there is a sense of urgency to better understand the current and future generations of Indigenous youth who have survived the Child Welfare system. While Indigenous people make up only 5% of the overall population, with over half living in an urban setting (Government of Canada, 2021), they are overrepresented caught up in systemic 'removal' from many areas of our society, indicating serious distress. The concept of 'removal,' in the context of this research, is understood not as an abstract or vague metaphor but as referring to the physical removal of Indigenous youth from society, communities, and our institutions. Areas in which Indigenous youth are over-represented and are 'removed' that contribute to this state of crisis involve the Canadian Child Welfare system, the correctional and educational institutions, and suicide.

Overall, Indigenous children "represent 48% of the children in the Canadian Child Welfare system, and in the province of Alberta upwards to an estimated 69%" (Aboriginal Children in Care Working Group, 2015, p. 7). Many Indigenous children are not growing up embedded in their families, their communities, or their culture. Indigenous youth are being

1. The diagram at the beginning of each chapter represents my experience of identity as being circular and fluid as opposed to fragmentated and in a box.

separated from cultural learning experiences and often being placed in foster homes or residential group homes. This removal of the youth from their communities and society can also be seen in the large number of incarcerated Indigenous youth in Canada. Aboriginal people are 10 times more likely to be incarcerated (Office of the Correctional Investigate, 2016), and Aboriginal youth make up 46% of all admissions to correctional facilities (Statistics Canada, 2018). Indigenous youth, statistically, have a higher chance of going to prison than they do university.

Moreover, from an educational perspective, we know that approximately 44% of Indigenous people between the ages of 20 and 24 have graduated from high school (Indigenous Services Canada, 2018). In Canadian society, if one does not complete high school, the risk of future challenges in adult life drastically increases. A high school diploma, in Canada's economy, is a precursor for employment or future educational endeavours and training. Without stable employment or post-secondary studies, it would be difficult for someone to be able to provide for themselves and their family. With education levels being an indicator of future earnings and financial stability, this low rate of high school graduation can contribute to the alarming rates of homelessness amongst Indigenous peoples. In Canada, 1 in 15 Indigenous people in urban settings experience homelessness, in comparison to 1 in 128 for the general population (Patrick, 2014). These statistics show that Indigenous people are underrepresented in both the educational system and housing security.

Indigenous youth are being removed from their families through the Child Welfare system, and from society through incarceration, but perhaps the most alarming statistic relates to how frequently Indigenous youth are removing themselves from this world. Indigenous youth are at amongst the highest risk in Canada for both suicide and suicide attempts. For the

Indigenous population, suicide rates are twice the national average and show no signs of decreasing …completed suicides among First Nation young adults aged 15 to 24 is five to seven times the Canadian average for the same age group (Caron, 2005). When we take into consideration other components of an Indigenous youth's identity, for example being part of the LGBTQ2IA+, Queer Indigenous youth are 20 times more likely to commit suicide than the national average (Kirmayer et al., 2007).

Research Question

Within my own experiences as an Indigenous woman and spending time with Indigenous youth in residential group home care, my eyes have been opened to the importance of more deeply exploring how Indigenous youth identity develops in urban settings, specifically in the context of involvement with the Child Welfare system. The statistics shine a light on how Indigenous youth are at much higher risks of suicide, homelessness, non-completion in education, and apprehension from families and communities. How we respond to this nationwide crisis is a life-or-death matter. The literature, which will be explored in the proceeding chapters, excessively highlights and, I would argue, narrowly presents Indigenous identity in a negative light. In agreement with Hampton (cited in Battiste, 2011), "just as counting the dead plants is an inadequate measure of the life of the seeds…so counting the deaths, the alcoholism rates, suicides, murders, and dropouts is inadequate to measure the vitality of Native life" (p. 35). This study will focus on the light, the positive, and the life-giving, for Indigenous youth. This research will engage with the following question: How do urban Indigenous survivors of the Child Welfare system feel about their identity development?

Survivor, in the context of this paper, is understood as simply being alive. This notion of survival is not founded on or measured by Western ideas of success placing value on things like

overcoming addiction, securing stable income, and housing, or receiving university degrees. Survival is being alive despite the trauma you have experienced, despite government attempts at eradicating your Indigenous ways of knowing and being, despite the government intervention in every aspect of your life.

Throughout this research study, it is important to note that the words Aboriginal, Native, Indian, and Indigenous are used interchangeably as the literature varies on the terminology used depending on the scholar or source. When referring to an Aboriginal person, a Native person, or an Indigenous person, this literature review is referring to the First Nations people of Canada, and when noted, the United States or Australia. The terminology in which we use to identify Indigenous peoples and communities in Canada has changed several times throughout history. Indian, First Nations, Aboriginal, and Indigenous have been used within policies at both the federal and provincial levels. While there is overlap between the experiences of Indigenous, Metis and Inuit people, this study acknowledges that they are distinct groups and there are differences in the impact's legislation has had on identity and identity development.

How did I even get here? (Personal Justification)

When discussing my investment into the study and understanding of urban Indigenous identity development, it can best be illustrated in a quote from the appendix of C. Wright Mills' book The Sociological Imagination, "I do not split my work from my life…I seem to take both too seriously to allow such a disassociation…I want to use each for the enrichment of the other" (1995, p. 95). While one may argue that academia is more straightforward when we emotionally remove ourselves from the process, that is something I simply cannot do. I am invested into this study based on my firsthand experiences as an urban Indigenous person as well as working with urban Indigenous youth in various capacities for the last decade.

Working from an Indigenous paradigm, it is Indigenous protocol to locate myself through my genealogical, cultural, and political set of experiences (Smith, 1999).My name is Kelsey Reed, and I am a member of the Beardy's and Okemasis First Nation in Saskatchewan. I am the daughter of Wendy and Randy Reed; the maternal granddaughter of Nancy Sutherland and Jack Pederson; and the paternal granddaughter of Thelma Hopper and John Reed. I have an older sister, Ashley, and two beautiful nieces, Stella and Lila. I have a younger brother Christopher who is currently living in Vancouver, British Colombia. I am a wife to Mona and a parent to Jordyn and Indie.

I am of both Cree and Irish descent, and I honour both influences on my positioning and understanding in and of the world (Kovach, 2009). I was raised in an urban setting and carry a legislated identity as a Status Indian; under the amendments to the Indian Act in 1985 I am legally identified as a Bill C-31 6(2) Indian. I currently live on Treaty 6 Territory whose original habitants were members of the Papaschase Band. Through colonization, the Papaschase Band members were displaced and removed from the area now known as Edmonton, Alberta. As I acknowledge the land that I am currently living on, I humbly admit that I am always learning and in the process of understanding my own relationship to land and place.

As I begin to engage with my research on urban Indigenous identity, I am required to see each situation not only as a scholar, but also as an urban Indigenous person, as a mother, and as a queer female. Dr. Judy Iseke, in her article Negotiating Métis culture in Michif: Disrupting Indigenous Language Shift explains how the Métis people of Canada are neither Indian nor European. "This is not some kind of hybridity – a notion in which identities are separate and fixed – Indigenous and European – but rather a drawing upon the strengths of both Nations in the production of an emergent and ever-evolving National identity – the Métis peoples of Canada"

(Iseke, 2013, p. 105)." When engaging in scholarly discussions regarding my positioning and identity, I cannot separate the three and simply look at issues through an Indigenous perspective, followed by a queer perspective, and then a female perspective just as Iseke suggests. The three connect and therefore create their own existing identity, which is the reality and location from which I speak.

We do what we do for emotional reasons (Hampton, 1995), and we must be certain that our motives for doing the research will result in benefits to the Indigenous communities (Weber-Pillwax, 1999). My motivation for researching urban Indigenous identity development and formation is influenced by both my experiences as an urban Indigenous person and my experience as a Child and Youth Care worker within the broader Child Intervention System. My professional experience with the topic of urban Indigenous identity consists of working on the front line for various social services programs in Edmonton, Alberta. In 2007, I began working for an Indigenous agency as a support worker for high-risk Indigenous youth, ages 12-18. My time spent working with Indigenous youth in a residential group home setting allowed me to see first-hand the struggles and barriers to success Indigenous youth experience. I observed a disconnection of these youth with their identities and their search for self-understanding and belonging. My position there allowed me other opportunities within other non-profit agencies. I have worked with the Indigenous homeless population as a housing worker with Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society, a support worker in a local shelter, Nova House with the John Howard Society, and an emotional support worker for Indian Residential School Survivors with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. My experiences working one-to-one with these populations have motivated me to seek a better understanding of what the urban Indigenous

identity is and how this understanding of Indigenous youth will strengthen the services and opportunities provided to them.

In developing relationships with inner-city Indigenous youth, I was able to make connections between their stories and my own. When I read the statistics about Indigenous children in care, I see their faces and I know their names. When I read the statistics on Indigenous youth who commit suicide, I reflect on the many funerals I have attended over the years for the homeless Indigenous youth I have worked with. When I read about how Indigenous youth are desperately seeking belonging and community, I listen to old voicemails from youth who have called me from prison and who are incarcerated because of gang and violence-related charges. Over the years, I have had hundreds of conversations with Indigenous youth on how they desperately want to reconnect with their culture, learn the traditions, and practice the ceremonies. The reality is our society and institutions are failing them. It is to them I am accountable.

My own experiences as a Cree woman are heavily influenced by my own transformational process and journey. While I was able to explore my Indigenous identity as an adult, this has not always been the case. Discovering my Indigenous identity and re-connecting with Indigenous culture presented several challenges throughout my childhood and adolescence. I have lived my entire life in an urban setting, and I grew up in a white community that also had deep roots in Catholicism. Being a queer Indigenous person, I was a living contradiction to my immediate environment. Within my extended family, there were both covert and overt messages of racism and homophobia. Who and what I was were not tolerated. While there are components of my own identity that I carry deep pride in today, they were the components that I attempted to not identify in public spaces growing up.

While there are undoubtedly several other contributing factors, this sense of hopelessness and confusion about belonging led to several adolescent years of substance abuse. I made several attempts to seek professional help, and it was not until I ended up in an Indigenous addiction facility in Calgary, Alberta that I was able to begin addressing the deep-rooted issues that were causing my negative behaviours. It was here that my healing journey began. With little to no experience with Indigenous culture and desperation to regain control of my life, I had committed to having an open mind to whatever the treatment program would offer. The treatment facility had several field trips and outings while I was staying there, one of which was attending a Pow Wow in a reserve neighbouring the city of Calgary. When I arrived, I felt uncomfortable, anxious, and out of place. I quickly found a spot to observe, and they started to play drums. The first time I heard that drum I was overpowered with emotion. Tears began to swell in my eyes and even to this day, I have a challenging time putting into words what it is that I felt. I was hurting, in the process of detoxing due to abstinence, and scared for the future, but then I heard that drum. The sounds vibrated through my body as if I had heard them many times before. To me, it was a feeling of finding a home and a place of acceptance, and this experience would be a catalyst for my recovery.

My time at the rehabilitation facility exposed me to Sweat Lodges, Smudging, Pow Wows, and spending time with Elders. When I returned home to Edmonton, I began to seek out those experiences in my own community. I quickly established a network of other Indigenous people, and I began to attend any and every cultural event that I could. I began to participate in the Sun dance, night lodges, Cree language course, etc. The Indigenous culture, for me, and I cannot stress this enough, saved my life. Growing up in Sherwood Park, experiencing racism within my community and even my own family, my Indigenous identity was something we

would never discuss. It was not about shame in our Indigenous identity; it came down to survival. When reflecting on her experiences, my mother often said she was too brown for one side and too white for the other, which has resulted in generations learning to navigate the complex racial environments we are required to live in.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations

This study was delimited to urban Indigenous people living in Edmonton, Alberta. It was also delimited to Indigenous people who were involved with Child and Family Services (Alberta Child Welfare). Involvement was limited to long-standing intervention of social workers and the Government of Alberta through Permanent Guardianship Orders (PGO). Permanent Guardianship Orders are granted by provincial courts under Section 34 of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act due to the child being in the custody of the provincial government for a significant period with no anticipated date to safely be returned to their parents in the foreseeable future, based on social workers' evaluation of living conditions (Government of Alberta, 2007). With these criteria, Indigenous people who were court identified under PGOs and were under long-term care of the government in residential group homes were asked to participate.

Limitations

This study was limited by the COVID-19 global pandemic. With several public health orders in place to avoid the spread of the virus, many of the settings in which face-to-face interviews could be conducted were not safe for both the participants and the researcher. Therefore, this study was limited to collecting data in ways that were in alignment with public health official recommendations such as using online platforms and/or six-foot distances between participants and researcher. This presented challenges such as access to computers

and/or the internet and the computer literacy of the participant. These challenges were addressed on a one-to-one basis with participants as they occurred through the data collection process. This study was also limited by the researcher's experiences as both a Child and Youth Care Practitioner and current position as an Assistant Professor in the Child and Youth Care Department with MacEwan University. Working in the Child and Youth Care field for several years provided me with the opportunity to work with hundreds of youths involved with the Child Welfare system. To ensure the confidentiality of the clients I worked with and their rights privacy, the participants selected for this study were not individuals that I had met as a Child and Youth Care Practitioner.

Theoretical Framework

For this study, Indigenous identity is understood through the interrelationship of three components.

The first is how we have come to understand our own Indigenous identity. Our understanding has been shaped and influenced by internal processing and dialogue. There is a need to understand the process, rather than a definition, of Indigenous identity. The focus here is not on what Indigenous identity is, as this has shown to be problematic consistently throughout both historical and contemporary literature, but a question of how one comes to a place of understanding oneself. This is a research project that aims to highlight the resilience and survival of Indigenous identity, rather than the intention of colonial policies to dispossess. Our Indigenous Identity is the accumulation, as cited by Ermine (1995), of valid searches for subjective inner knowledge that supported us in arriving to insights of our own positioning in the world and insights into our own existence.

The second component is how we understand our Indigenous identity in relation to others. The context in which we live and the relationships we establish can support, contradict, or both support and contradict the ways in which we understand who we are as Indigenous Peoples. Building off Lawrence (2003), identity is understood as neither neutral, passive, nor fixed… it is relational, juxtaposed with others' identities, with how we see ourselves and others (p. 4). This relationality in identity development for Indigenous peoples does not perceive an individual in isolation but as a moving part in an ever-changing web of relationships. Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's (1994) Ecological Theory Model, our understanding of our identities is impacted and influenced based on the relationships that exist within our microsystems, which include our interpersonal relations, families, and peer groups. Those in our proximity, whom we interact with on a day-to-day basis, help shape the ways in which we understand ourselves.

The third component, though possibly better categorized as an external influencer of understanding our identity, is the role policy has played in disrupting, shaping, and attempting to

eradicate positive self-concept for Indigenous youth. Indigenous identity has been legislated and questioned, while western frameworks of understanding have been violently enforced and decided upon with minimal Indigenous input and consultation. This component includes the combination of the individual's macrosystem, or societal blueprint which includes laws, policies, and ideologies, and their chronosystem, or changes experienced over periods of time (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Laws and policies enforced by the Canadian government have impacted every aspect of Indigenous life; including but not limited to where they live, the languages they speak, and the traditions they practice. These laws and policies, which will be further discussed in the literature review, include the Indian Act, Gradual Civilization Act, Indian Residential Schools, and Sixties Scoop.

The three components are interconnected and cannot be understood in isolation. **Indigenous identity can be understood using a psycho-socio-political model**.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

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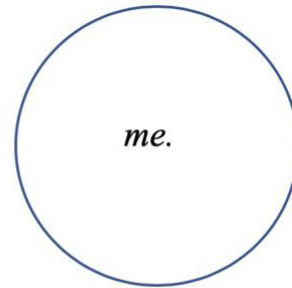
Indigenous identity is explored throughout the literature and can be understood under two major themes, the impact of historical policy and the complexities it has created within contemporary contexts for Indigenous identity development. When considering the current realities of Indigenous peoples' identity development and shifts to urban settings, the historical context plays a significant role in shedding light on the complexities of this reality. While identity has been described as a subjective experience or an individual understanding of self (Ermine, 1995), external factors have attempted to dispossess and eliminate the "Indian" identity from the developing Canadian society using federal policy as an instrument. In complete agreement with Lawrence (2003), "exploring the Indian Act and subsequent policies, and its impact on the ways in which Native people think of themselves is not to deny Native people agency to move beyond its logic" (p. 4). Indigenous people in Canada, and globally, have proven repeatedly that they are resilient. Indigenous identity, languages, ceremonies, and traditions have survived hundreds of years of attack not because of federal policies, but in despite of them.

While the literature could be understood in linear progression (as it will be presented in the following sections), it often overlaps and is intertwined. The profound impact public policy has had on Indigenous life has been far-reaching across generations. Policy, with the intention of eradicating Indigenous ways of knowing and being, has dictated how people can live, where they can live, with whom they can live, and so on. With hundreds upon hundreds of years of different public policies, it is beyond the scope of this research to explore each policy and therefore specific policies were selected for the literature review that pertain to the impacts on Indigenous identity development. It is essential that the history of Canadian public policy be explored to understand the current realities of Indigenous youth. When we speak about the alarming statistics surrounding Indigenous peoples in Canada as previously mentioned, it is important to note that we did not get to this place overnight. This has been the result of government interferences, many of which resulted in public apologies from government officials.

The Royal Proclamation

Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations reflect "two contrasting societies [that] cooperated successfully for centuries before their relationship deteriorated into conflict and confrontation" (Miller, 1991, p. 4). Through several policies, the Indigenous peoples shifted from positive allies of the British to a demographic that was getting in the way of expansion and the development of a Eurocentric infrastructure.

The Royal Proclamation of 1763 was "drafted to deal with the aftermath of the Seven Years' War and the extensive French and Spanish colonial territories to Great Britain in the Treaty of Paris" (Slattery, 2015, p. 16). This began the formal relationship between the Crown and First Nations and is considered crucially important in establishing the protocols, policies, and procedures of the enduring treaty relationship with Aboriginal peoples (Calloway, 2015).

King George III declared that the Indigenous peoples of Canada, who lived under their control and protection, were not to be "molested or disturbed…thus recognizing the sovereignty of Indigenous nations" (Herbert, 2019, p. 569). This Act recognized Aboriginal title to all lands not ceded and acknowledged, and it also developed and implemented the Department of Indian Affairs (Lawrence, 2003). Clauses within the proclamation forbid the selling off of Indigenous lands, the implementation of required permits to engage in trade, in hopes that it would avoid conflict with the land-hungry immigrants (Miller, 1991). The Royal Proclamation created the groundwork and foundation for developing nation-to-nation treaties with the Indigenous peoples.

Despite the fact the Royal Proclamation was framed in a way that suggest peaceful negotiations between the British Crown and the Indigenous Peoples of Canada, it began a long relationship of Crown and government interference with Indigenous life through various policies. The Royal Proclamation laid the groundwork for Indigenous Treaty Rights in Canada and is often argued by historians who see this era as the genesis of humanitarianism regarding the Indigenous peoples of Canada (Carter, 2003). When the Royal Proclamation is read in its entirety, "it does affirm Indigenous rights, but it does not affirm or confer an inherent right of self-government or absolute Aboriginal sovereignty…to possess something does not mean to own…to be under the protection of does not mean autonomy" (Borrows, 1994, p. 31). Indigenous peoples and communities were self-governing prior to contact and lived on the land For settlers to come onto the land and impose proclamations and policies onto the original inhabitants, is not humanitarianism…it is colonization. As a result, this began the process of legislating Indigenous identity. Legislating identity places power in the observer who observes Indigenous people from the outside and shifts away from identity as a process of being and becoming (Restoule, 2000).

Indian Act-Legislated Identities

While the relationship "between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples began as military allies and business partners" (Episkenew, 2009, p. 21), in 1867 with the passage of the British North American Act, Canadians began the process of nation-building (Milloy, 2008). "The European colonial officials wanted to open up the land for settlement and, learning from their experiences in the East and observing the American experience, they were cognizant that Indians were capable of disrupting this process…the advancement of a superior civilization and eradication of Indigenous population was then decided to be implemented through public policy" (Episkenew, 2009, p. 26). The relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people shifted from one of trade and reciprocity, to the mindset of conquering and domination.

Lawler (2008) argues that identity has been the root of bloodshed in a global context, where similarities between groups of people are downplayed, and the differences become exaggerated (p. 4). While Lawler provides examples of differences being exaggerated between the Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda, between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, and even goes to make connections to the Nazi race laws in the 1930s and 1940s in Germany (Lawler, 2008)), the same argument can be applied to the Indigenous peoples of Canada. Indigenous peoples labelled uncivilized and savage, needed to be identified, controlled, and assimilated to make Canada one community…a non-Aboriginal one (Milloy, 2014). This process of order building (Razack, 2015) required the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and the development of a relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people that is "both spatially and racially organized between modern subjects and those who need to be supported to modernity" (p. 32).

It was through the development and implementation of the Indian Act that the federal government would legislate Indigenous identity and they would decide who belonged and who did not. The consequence of such a divisive policy echoed and continues to echo within Indigenous communities and families.

The Indian Act created a working definition as to who was considered a status Indian, and therefore allowed colonial officials to begin addressing, what Duncan Campbell Scott referred to, as the 'Indian Problem.' Episkenew (2009) asserts that colonial officials did not need to differentiate who was Aboriginal and who was white…that was obvious…they had a difficult time determining who was considered 'pure' and an authentic Indian and who had already been contaminated with European influences such as Christianity or engagement with agriculture and commerce (p. 27).   The determination of who was considered a status Indian was based on both blood quantum logic as well as an outsider's perspective on living an authentic Indian lifestyle (Episkenew, 2009; Lawrence, 2003, Palmeter, 2011). Based on the classification systems of Native Americans in the United States, the overall formulas to determine blood quantum were quite simple for colonial officials and reflect a basic concept of blood quantum or descent-based rules designed to assimilate all Indians through legislative extinction" (Palmeter, 2011, p. 29).

Alongside the Indian Act, the federal government enforced the Gradual Civilization Act of 1869. What first began as a voluntary enfranchisement, developed into a set of policies that would further attempt to forcefully assimilate more Indigenous peoples and reduce the number of status Indians. "The Act provided that any Indian judged to be educated, free from debt and of good moral character could apply to receive land within the colony and the rights accompanying it" (Milloy, 2008, p. 6). Indigenous peoples, when deemed to be civilized enough, would be

stripped of their Indian status. The Act allowed the federal government to implement

involuntary enfranchisement for various reasons; as previously mentioned becoming educated;

women who married a non-Indian man (Furi & Wherrett, 2003); "absence from the reserve for a

long period of time'…joined a profession (Episkenew, 2009, p. 30); and later extended to status

Indians who joined the military (Joseph, 2016). By using blood quantum logic, subjective

observations of Indigenous Peoples lifestyle to determine authenticity, and enforcing the Gradual

Civilization Act, the number of Indians would slowly diminish until there would not be any left.

Impacts of the Indian Act on Indigenous Women

The Indian Act had devastating impacts on Indigenous peoples, specifically on

Indigenous women. Determining who was considered an Indian and who was not attempted to

disrupt and reframe traditional roles that existed prior to settler contact. The Indian Act created

instability for Indigenous women because of its gendered nature: it privileged men over women,

as women lost their status by marrying non-Indigenous men (Episkenew, 2009), and encoded the

disempowerment of Indigenous women by systematically withholding rights equal to those of

men (Woolsley, 2012). Indigenous women then became, for lack of a better term, either the

property of the Indigenous men or were required to leave their community. Considering the

significant role Indigenous women played in their communities, this encoded, forced, and strictly

observed patrilineal descent disrupted the natural transmission of culture from one generation to

the next (Woolsley, 2012). "The children and grandchildren of these women, today, as urban

mixed-race Native people, are struggling to situate themselves with respect to their mothers' and

grandmothers' communities within a discourse of 'Indianness' that denies their realities"

(Lawrence, 2003, p. 6).

The Indian Act of 1867 wreaked havoc on Indigenous communities. The development and implementation of these policies appropriated Indigenous peoples' right to identify themselves and imposed a governing system on communities that to them were foreign and unnatural (Episkenew, 2009). When looking at the impacts this has on identity development, Indigenous peoples were forced into a categorizing system that did not align with how they traditionally determined community. The colonizer created a monopoly on interpretation, which denied Indigenous people the freedom to label their world (Vermette, 2009). If you were deemed 'civilized' enough to enter mainstream society, you were no longer able to live on reserve, even though that was where your family lived. Not only does that remove your support systems, but it also negatively impacts the transmission of culture from one generation to the next.

The Gradual Enfranchisement Act was producing results; however, the process was still not moving fast enough for government officials. The Department envisioned increasing the numbers of Indigenous youth abandoning their communities through enfranchisement, the goal of self-efficiency was abandoned in favour of the assimilation of the individual through the corridors of Indian Residential Schools (Milloy, 2014).

Indian Residential Schools

The Indian Residential Schools (IRS) have had devastating impacts on Indigenous identity development and the transmission of culture and language to the following generations. When Indigenous people were not being assimilated into the 'civilized' society at a quick enough rate, in 1920 it had been decided that the attendance to Indian Residential Schools would become mandatory for all Indigenous children (Walker, 2009). Between the years 1831 and 1996, there were over 130 residential schools in Canada, with an estimated 150,000 children who attended

(Canadian Encyclopedia, 2012). The Truth and Reconciliation interviewed IRS survivors through several events that were hosted around the country. Many Canadians were appalled by the stories that were emerging at the conferences; however, for Indigenous peoples, this was a reality they have been experiencing in their own lives for many generations. The impacts of these schools disrupted Indigenous ways of life, family dynamics, and communities. "Although the residential school has now been demolished, the nearby gravestones of those who killed themselves or died of addictions suggest an enduring legacy of violence in the community that is at least partly linked to the school" (Razack, 2015, p. 19). The impacts Indian Residential Schools had on identity, both historically and contemporarily, have been devastating.

Attacks on Identity

The Indian Residential Schools were designed to remove any remnants of Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the children. Oftentimes when we are discussing IRS, we hear stories of physical and sexual abuse that the children received during their time there; however, the physical violence was being used as a tool for forced assimilation. The Department of Indian Affairs and the church realized early on that it could not just be the separation from the parents, changing to European attire, or the influence from the priests, but "rather the profound pre-requisite for re-socialization was a concerted attack on the ontology of the children" (Milloy, 2014, p. 37). A child's ontology, "the symbolic ordering of the world through which actions and objects take meaning, is inherited from their parents and community from the moment of birth" (Milloy, 2014, p. 37). The children's ontology would then need to be disrupted and forcefully moulded to Eurocentric values and ways of life.

The experiences of students who attended these schools had a shattered the development of a positive Indigenous identity not only for the survivors, but also for their children,

grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. "The overwhelming majority of students recall their time as a traumatic one dominated by feelings of fear, loneliness, and unhappiness, adding that the students were often hungry, being strapped for speaking their own language, and being taught to feel ashamed of their Indian culture and heritage" (Razack, 2015, p. 19). Distancing themselves from their Indigenous culture was enforced through policies, violence, and multiple forms of abuse.

Loss of Language

The children arrived at the schools and the forced assimilation was immediately implemented. Language, an aspect of culture that is so central to its expression and transmission, was a major issue within the schools that needed to be eliminated in the first few days of the children's arrival at the schools (Haig-Brown, 1988). It was through the language that the culture was being transferred from one generation to the next, a vital connection that needed to be stamped out as soon as possible if the department and church were to be successful (Milloy, 2014). Children were forcibly punished for speaking their Indigenous languages and they soon realized that being silent was their best bet for survival. Makokis (2009) argues that the IRS destroyed the connection between the students and their native languages, and with it, their connection to the teachings about who they are and how they are to be in this world. It left children, entire families, and communities, in a confused way of thinking, believing, and living…a loss of moral compass and spirit…and made them more vulnerable to illnesses such as the addiction and violence epidemic currently engulfing Indigenous communities (Makokis, 2014). The abuse experienced by the students in the schools left entire communities unable to communicate in their native languages. "It is estimated that at the time of first contact with Europeans, there were approximately 450 Aboriginal languages and dialects in Canada…there

are now only 60, and only three of those 60 are expected to remain and flourish in Aboriginal communities" (McIvor, 2009, p. 12). Indigenous communities are making efforts for language revitalization across the country in attempts to preserve the languages lost through the enforcement of harmful and destructive policies.

Internalization of Abuse

A consistent theme throughout the literature that emerges surrounding the impact of IRS on identity is that the years of abuse made the students feel shame about who they are and where they came from. "The ideology of imperialism was dependent on binary oppositions, right/wrong, light/dark, civilized/savage, and good/evil" (Episkenew, 2009, p. 29). With the schools maintaining a heavy emphasis on religion, the binary concepts of both sin and hell were used as tools to instill shame and fear into the children, a hidden part of the curriculum. Indigenous values and beliefs were demonized, and day after day the children were told that they needed to be saved by God and religion. Haig-Brown (1988) found in a study with Residential School survivors stated that many of the participants felt guilt and shame around their behaviours and their family's behaviours. An example of this would be that the children were taught that drinking, not attending church, and having sexual intercourse were all sins that would result in you going to hell. When children returned to their communities, and their parents did not attend church and/or drank alcohol, they were ashamed of them. This also further complicated how many of the children processed their own sexual abuse that they experienced during their time in the IRS. Sex was considered a sin and they had been sexually abused; one participant in Haig-Brown's study stated that she ended up feeling dirty because of this. Furthermore, another strategy the schools used was to have the children monitor and discipline their fellow classmates.

In so doing, the children were not only being shamed by the school staff but were receiving the same treatment from the other children.

Intergenerational Trauma

The struggles that Indigenous children who attended Indian Residential Schools experienced did not end when they returned to their communities as young adults. The Residential School Syndrome framework was developed to better understand the complex social and mental health issues survivors were experiencing (Aguiar & Halseth, 2015, p. 9). The excessive discipline and punishment in the schools led to a complete rejection of all things Aboriginal resulting in" development of a low self-concept, self-esteem, anger, hostility, self-destructive behaviours, and substance abuse disorders" (Aguiar & Halseth, 2015, p. 20). These responses to the trauma they experienced in the IRSs have had damaging impacts on Indigenous family units. In these shame-bound regimes, Indigenous families can experience high rates of family violence, engaging in self-harmful behaviours (seeking out and staying in traumatic bonding relationships), punitive parenting strategies, and creating family environments where dysfunction is the norm (Aguiar & Halseth, 2015). Trauma is being transmitted from one generation to the next, impacting the children, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren of survivors. Aguiar & Halseth (2015) identify several different pathways in which trauma becomes intergenerational: psychological process, the impacts of stress on brain development; physiological process, the impacts of trauma on the body; and social processes that occur within the family and community of individuals who have attended the IRS's. Indigenous youth are still experiencing the devastating aftermath the schools had on their parents and communities.

Sixties Scoop

With the goal of complete assimilation of the Indian to the dominant culture in the 1950s,

the government of Canada was not satisfied with the demonstrated resilience of Indigenous

people to keep their culture and traditions alive. With the Second World War ending, the

profession of social work began to develop and many new professionals were anxious to find

problems to solve (Episkenew, 2009). Under the Canadian Constitution Child Welfare is usually

a provincial jurisdiction; however, the federal government was responsible for all Indians under

the Indian Act. Indian reserves were off limits for social workers at this time, but in 1951, the

federal government amended Section 88 of the Indian Act to allow "all laws of general

application from time to time in force in any province applicable to and in respect of Indians in

the province, both on and off reserve" (Kozlowski, 2013, pp. 3-4). By establishing this policy,

the federal government allowed social workers to intervene on reserves and enforce their own

opinions related on what constituted normal' family functioning versus what required

apprehension. Social workers had the authority in "defining, transmitting, and shaping what were

seen as legitimate or normal cultural expectations and practices" (Ward, 1984, p. 22). The power

of authority shifted from the priests and nuns to the social workers as to who would be

responsible for the Indigenous children.

> "Gradually, as education ceased to function as the institutional agent of colonization, the
>
> child welfare system took its place. It could continue to remove Native children from
>
> their parents, devalue Native custom and traditions in the process, but still act 'in the best
>
> interests of the child" (Macdonald, 2007, p. 38).

The amendment of the policy to allow social workers on reserve occurred around the same time Indian Residential schools were starting to be phased out. The Child Welfare system was in the process of becoming the government's next method of colonization for Indigenous people. "In 1959 only one percent of the children in care were Aboriginal, and by late 1960s Aboriginal children rose to thirty to forty percent" (Fournier, 1997, p.83). Children were "scooped" from their homes without consultation of Indigenous communities regarding needed supports, and without parental consent. The Sixties Scoop was based on what the social workers believed to be the only way to support Indigenous children. Indigenous children were apprehended from their homes at an alarming rate and often moved outside of their home communities, provinces, and in some cases their country. The children were shuffled around between group homes, foster care placements, and juvenile detention facilities. "The result of many of these placements has been a multitude of testimonies about experiences with racism, sexual abuse, physical violence, emotional and psychological trauma, fractured self-identity, cultural dislocation, fear, and unmitigated outrage" (Fournier, 1997). The catchphrase "Sixties Scoop" can be misleading, as the high percentage of Indigenous children in care remains to this day.

The Royal Commission of Aboriginal People (RCAP, 1996) reports that 70% of Aboriginal children in care apprehended between 1960-1990 were adopted out to white families. Transracial adoptions can be a very traumatic experience for a child and many foster families were not prepared to successfully harbour that transition. "Often the only difference between the parents whose children were stolen away and those who took in foster children for a little extra cash was the color of their skin" (Episkenew, 2009, p. 66). These children experienced a tremendous sense of loss. The children that were taken through the sixties scoop were

overwhelmed with nostalgia: a deep sense of yearning for their home, their family, and their way of being. "Anxiety and culture shock were common after moving from remote, rural areas into suburban settings to live with strangers" (York, 1990). The children that were apprehended in the Sixties Scoop were placed alone in an unknown setting with unknown people. "When an individual enters the field alone, or even with such significant others as spouse or nuclear family, the friendlessness and non-relatedness to the immediate population is apparent. The distance between self and significant others is magnified and/or distorted" (Eckerman, 1996).

Current Realities of the Child Welfare System

The removal of children from their homes and communities is still a reality across Canada. Currently in the Child Welfare system in Canada, commonly known in Alberta as Child and Family Services (CFS), reports that the percentage of Aboriginal children in care reaches 60-78% in some provinces and territories, with higher rates in the western provinces (Statistics Canada, 2009). The over-representation of Indigenous children in care has been of concern for several years with little success in reducing those numbers. In Alberta specifically, Indigenous children are 31 times more likely to come into care in comparison to non-Indigenous children; this level of over-representation is amongst the highest in Canada (Office of the Child and Youth Advocate Alberta, 2016).

To reiterate previous policies, the first ethical responsibility in the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) Guidelines for Ethical Practice is "(1.1) Social Workers maintain the best interests of clients as a priority" (CASW, 2005, p. 3). Social work is currently still a profession that is predominantly run by non-Indigenous people and agencies, although there have been some efforts made to develop and incorporate more culturally aware practices within the

Child Welfare profession. Many Indigenous children in urban settings are served by mainstream provincial or territorial Child Welfare services where provinces and territories create legislation and mandates, regulate service delivery, control funding, and act as the overall governmental authority (Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017). Decisions regarding Indigenous children continue to be made by non-Indigenous people who are deciding what they believe is in their best interest. While many do not want to admit this, the justification parallels the same logic that founded the Indian Residential School Systems. An ethnocentric lens is used to determine how Indigenous peoples should be living, what their homes should look like, and what kinship both means and how it appears. What current policy around Indigenous child welfare often neglects is the socio-economic disparities that exist because of oppression.

As a result of colonizing policies towards Indigenous people, the Indian Act, Indian Residential Schools, Sixties Scoop and so forth, have attempted to disrupt the transmission of Indigenous knowledge from one generation to the next. While we often discuss these policies in isolation, they are intertwined and have been consistent in Indigenous peoples' lives for generations. Although the Indian Residential Schools have all been closed, we have shifted to the mass apprehension of Indigenous children from their families and communities. There is sufficient evidence to show "that between 1989 and 2012, Indigenous children have spent over 66 million nights in foster care, or 167 000 years of Indigenous children's childhoods" (Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017, p. 9). Furthermore, the number of Indigenous children in care outside their own homes today is three times the number of children in Indian Residential Schools at the height of their operation (Blackstock, 2008). Indigenous identity has been and continues to be disrupted by the colonial state. In considering the historical context of

federal policies, it is the understanding of both the historical context and contemporary realities of Indigenous peoples that need to be considered.

Shifts to Urban Settings

For the purposes of this study, urban settings were based on Statistics Canada's definition of a metropolitan area of at least 100,000 inhabitants and a population density of at least 400 people per square kilometre (Northern Affairs Canada, 2013). Under these criteria, in 2016, 867,415 Aboriginal people lived in a metropolitan area, accounting for over half (51.8%) of the total Aboriginal population (Statistics Canada, 2019). The census metropolitan areas of Winnipeg (92,810), Edmonton (76,205), Vancouver (61, 460) and Toronto (46,315) had the largest Aboriginal populations…and from 2006 to 2016 there has been a 59.7% increase across Canada of Aboriginal people living in metropolitan areas (Statistics Canada, 2019).

In understanding the migration patterns of Indigenous people there are several components that the literature identifies that have influenced the steady increase in the number of Indigenous people migrating to metropolitan areas. The components identified and that will be further explored include the impacts of federal government policies and amendments to existing policies, natural patterns in demographic shifts, and personal choices made by Indigenous people to leave their reservations.

Gradual Civilization Act

As previously stated, the Gradual Enfranchisement Act was intrusive on Indigenous life in many ways. Indigenous people became enfranchised for several reasons, such as working off reserve, joining the military, pursuing an education, or whom they decided to marry. One of the many consequences enfranchisements had been on where Indigenous people could live. This

policy of forced and immediate assimilation resulted in the abandonment of reserve rights and

the right to live with one's family and culture (Moss, Gardner-O'Toole, 1987). When a Status

Indian became enfranchised, they were no longer allowed to live on the reservation. They were

forced to leave the reserve, and as a result families and communities were torn apart. It can be

argued that the shift of Indigenous people living in urban settings was a result of discriminatory

policies that infringed on Indigenous peoples' rights.

> Personal Communication with my Kokum
>
> *"When I was released from St. Michaels Indian Residential School, I came back home, and I had nothing. There was no work. I did not have food to eat, a bed to sleep in, or clothes to wear. There were no options, and I was desperate. The government was really selling this idea that I could join the Canadian Armed Forces. I had no options and I decided that I would enlist. The Canadian Armed Forces would provide me with food to eat, a uniform to wear, and a bed to sleep in. I received a letter from the federal government informing me that if I enlisted, I would lose my Indian Status. At the time, I signed the letter and that was that. "*

The shift to urban settings had been noted early as the 1950s to 1960s with some cities

experiencing increases of up to fifty percent of Indigenous people (Norris & Clatworthy,

2011). Although many Indigenous people may now be moving to urban settings by choice, in

the earlier stages, they were not.

Amendments to Indian Act Bill C-31

Another component that needs to be considered when understanding the data on

migration patterns of Indigenous peoples to urban settings is the amendments to the Indian Act in

1985. As previously stated, Indigenous women would lose their status if they married a non-

Indigenous man. This meant that their children would also lose their Indian status. As Jamieson

noted (cited in Giokas, 1995), "this institutionalizing of inequality of sexual grafting into

Indigenous communities placed Indigenous women at the bottom of the hierarchical structure"

(p. 34). To eliminate sexual discrimination, in 1985 amendments were changed to the Indian

Act, was tabled in the House of Commons on 28 February 1985, passed on 17 June 1985 and given Royal Assent on 28 June 1985The bill would conform to the equality provisions of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the amendments were intended to remove discrimination, restore status and membership rights, and increase control by bands over their affairs (Furi & Wherrett, 1996). This must be considered in making sense of the data because following the amendment, there was a dramatic increase in the amount of registered Status Indians. By August 1995, the status Indian population had risen from its 1985 level of 360,241 to 586,580…an overall increase of 61.4% (Furi & Wherrett, 1996). The dramatic numbers we see in Indigenous people shifting to urban settings were not solely because they were moving to cities, but also because the amendments were now including those who had to earlier be relocated because of their loss of Indian Status. These people always existed, and it is important to state that. The increase of Indigenous people counted in the censuses can be contributed to the phenomena of ethnic mobility, which is defined as changes in self-reporting of ethnic identities (Guimond & Senécal, 2009). A large group of Indigenous people, who were not previously considered Status Indians, were now able to self-identify. With the amendments to the Indian Act and the dramatic increase of eligible Status Indians, the reactions have been mostly negative (Lawrence, 2003). Band membership increase put a temporary strain on already limited Band resources: "of the more than 600 Bands in Canada a total of 79, or 13%, face a potential population increase of more than 100%" (Lawrence, 2002, p.14). With the already existing issues with overcrowding in homes and some communities' reluctance and "anxiety over the implications of opening up Native identity in directions the community will be unable to control" (Lawrence, 2003, p. 15), many reinstated Indigenous women were unable to return to their home communities, even if they desired to do so.

Natural Patterns

There is a natural pattern that is noteworthy when it comes to understanding the statistics on Indigenous people moving to the city: this pattern, identified through the Statistics Canada census, is that the Indigenous population is growing at a much faster rate than non-Indigenous people. Since 2006, the Aboriginal population has grown by 42.5%—more than four times the growth rate of the non-Aboriginal population over the same period. Population projections show that the number of Aboriginal people will continue to grow quickly (Statistics Canada, 2019). An increase in the number of Indigenous children being born also contributes to the increase of Indigenous people living in cities.

The increase of Indigenous children being born in cities and the changes to the number of Status Indians that are now self-identifying on census surveys, has fed a myth that there is a 'mass exodus' from Indian Reservations to cities (Guimond, 2009). Research on net migration showed that more Indigenous people moved into reservations than out (Aboriginal Affairs, 2013). The dramatic increase of Indigenous people living in cities is a result of more Indigenous children being born rather than people leaving their reservations.

Personal Reasons for Moving to the City

While policy has impacted the migration patterns of Indigenous peoples, there have been several studies that have provided insight into the more intrinsic motivators for Indigenous people moving to metropolitan areas. Factors or reasons for migration can be complex and would typically include both 'push' factors (causes of movement away from places of origin) and 'pull' factors (causes of movement into destinations) (Anderson, 2013).

Push Factors-Housing.

Several studies have identified poor housing conditions and infrastructure on reserves being the reason Indigenous people migrated to metropolitan areas (Caryl, 2014; Alcantra, 2005, Howard-Bobiwash &Proulx, 2011). Housing, in many Indigenous communities, is limited. Brandon & Peters (2014) conducted a study with urban Indigenous participants who had moved to Winnipeg. The participants spoke of long waiting lists and lack of running water; some had even experienced extreme flooding and overcrowding is six times higher on reserve than off (Brandon & Peters, 2014). In another study conducted in Toronto, Patrick (2014) expands on the response of overcrowding to include that some of the houses lacked electricity, had poor insulation, had confirmed toxic mould, and were developed with substandard construction, all of which can impact the quality of life of participants.

The migration of Indigenous people from their communities to urban settings due to housing insecurity "cannot be disassociated from the failure of the federal government to live up to its constitutional Treaty obligations to provide adequate housing on reserves" (Brandon & Peters, 2014, p. 10). The lack of housing on-reserve can be contributed to chronic underfunding of the federal government, the fast-growing Indigenous population, and the complex challenges created by the governing laws regarding ownership of the land. "Reserve lands remain property of the federal government, in accordance with the Indian Act that severely limits private ownership" (Patrick, 2014, p. 16). In addition, "Section 28 and 29 of the Indian Act prohibit lending institutions from seizing on-reserve Aboriginal assets in the event of payment default making it extremely difficult for this population to obtain mortgages or build their own homes" (Patrick, 2014, p. 16). There are not enough houses, there is not enough funding to keep up with needed renovations, and community members have a challenging time building their own homes

on reserve. They are then left with the decision to either live in overcrowded homes in need of repair or move to urban settings where there is more housing available.

Pull Factors

There are some factors that pull Indigenous people from their home communities into urban cities. In 2010, the Environics Institute published a report on a study that was conducted to provide insight into both the demographics and individual experiences of urban Indigenous people. In interviewing 2614 Indigenous people, from 11 different cities across Canada, the participants provided several distinct reasons as to why they moved and stayed in urban settings (Environics Institute, 2010). The most common response for moving to the city by participants was to be closer to family (38%) (Environics Institute, 2010). Moving to the city or an urban setting to be closer to family was most common for Indigenous women, who were also more likely to move to the urban settings to raise their children and/or escape a bad family situation in their home communities (Environics Institute, 2010). The second most common response from participants as to why they moved into urban settings was to pursue higher education (37%) (Environics Institute, 2010). In some Indigenous communities, educational opportunities, specifically post-secondary opportunities are unavailable (Collier, 2020). To pursue a post-secondary credential and improve future employment prospects, many Indigenous people, especially those living in remote communities must move closer to post-secondary institutions. The third reason Indigenous people are pulled into urban settings, and the most common from Indigenous men, as well as migration from city to city, is to seek employment opportunities (37%) (Environics Institute, 2010).

Contemporary Context

Socio-economic Distress (Poverty)

The ongoing legacy of these destructive policies can be seen in the current realities Indigenous people are facing today. While the policies were created to assimilate Indigenous people into the developing Canadian society, integration was not successful and led to what Battiste (1998) described as the quasi-permanent creation of an acutely underdeveloped community and socio-economic class. In re-defining Indigenous peoples as culturally deprived, providing them with a substandard education which they attempted to eradicate the Indigenous ways of knowing and being established inequalities in our society that would keep Indigenous people in an underprivileged position (Gosh & Abdi, 2004). With the ongoing racial bias of settlers, few jobs for graduates, and the sub-standard education received from the Indian Residential Schools, the "disemployed were forced into a position of seemingly immutable material dependency" (Episkenew, 2009, p. 53) upon settler society.

The Indian Act (1867) and other policies discussed throughout this literature review not only placed Indigenous peoples in their current state of extreme poverty but also keeps them in this state due to the chronic underfunding of essential services (Palmeter, 2011). Within Canada, the highest rates of poverty are found among Indigenous children: 53% Indigenous children living on reserve, and 41% living off reserve fall below the poverty line (Beedie, Macdonald, Wilson, 2019). Living in poverty has adverse impacts on one's identity development and overall well-being as it influences every component of one's life. Hermes (2005) interviewing a school administrator stated that our children and youth are not being raised in a Native American culture, they are being raised in a low socio-economic poverty culture. This context becomes what Green (2006) "refers to as a 'defining path' that makes marginalization probable: poverty, non-integration into the conventional job market, involvement in gainful activities that are

socially frowned upon, unacceptable or even criminal, violence, alcohol, drugs, homelessness, reliance on food banks and shelters" (p. 514 cited in Reed, 2016, p. 14). Living in poverty impacts both how you see yourself and how those around you see you.

Housing

As previously stated, many Indigenous people leave their reservations or home communities to move to urban settings due to overcrowding, poor living conditions and lack of infrastructure. Unfortunately, when they move to metropolitan areas, they continue to experience difficulties in finding affordable housing. Often, Indigenous people are forced to choose between overcrowded housing in their home communities and unaffordable housing in cities (Brandon & Peters, 2014). With limited options as to where you can live, Indigenous people are then forced to live in segregated neighbourhoods where there is more exposure to poverty-related challenges such as violence, gangs, and substance abuse. A study conducted in Winnipeg on Indigenous migration patterns found that Indigenous people are being exposed to property owners who coerce them into signing leases before seeing their apartments or refuse to return damage deposits; there are even some reported cases of sexual harassment (Brandon & Peters, 2014). It becomes exceedingly difficult to explore one's Indigenous identity when one's immediate environment presents challenges and barriers in one's day-to-day living.

When working with homeless youth and young adults, one of the biggest challenges was finding them affordable housing in neighbourhoods where they were not exposed to crime, drug activity, and violence. "There is a spatialized component to the racism in Canada" (Green, 2006, p. 516); the colonizers force the colonized into the least desired areas and neighbourhoods in the city. From my experience working with Indigenous youth and young adults, there were challenges in developing a positive Indigenous identity when they are hungry. It was difficult to

include Indigenous culture into their daily lives when they did not know where they were going to sleep that night. It was difficult to instill Indigenous pride into them when they were begging for change on the street corner. When people do not have security in life's necessities it impacts the ways in which they see themselves and the ways in which they relate to those around them. Identity development, therefore, becomes a second priority to surviving (Peters, 2011; Berry, 1999).

Internalization of Oppression/Socioeconomic Distress

Society

Berry (1999)'s study on Aboriginal Identity acknowledges that many of the participants noted "how one's identity is defined by others impacts heavily on who you feel you are" (p. 18). It may be assumed that because of the formal apology to Indian Residential School survivors by Stephen Harper, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action, and the resulting changes to policies and practices in Canadian society, that change has occurred or is occurring regarding the tense relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. However, the ongoing racial tension in Canada can best be depicted in the two recent acquittals of non-Indigenous men in the murders of Colton Boushie and Tina Fontaine. With the news of the acquittals coming only a few weeks apart, the public response both online and in the media demonstrated "the depth of anti-Indigenous sentiments within the nation" (Thobani, 2018, p. 171). These two events, important to note here that they are by no means isolated incidents, shone a spotlight on the complex relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. They were two tragedies and losses of Indigenous life that brought race relations to a boiling point in which people felt obligated to pick a side.

As stated by Green (2006), Canada is living in a time of liberal ideas that include beliefs of neutrality and equitable meritocracy in which the most competent will succeed in our society (p. 511). "Disconnected from their own knowledge, voices, and historical experiences, minorities in Canada have been led to believe that their poverty and powerlessness are the result of their cultural and racial status and origins…their difference is the cause of their impoverished state" (Battiste, 1998, p. 21). Therefore, the high representation of homelessness, suicide rates, unemployment, and high school non-completion rates amongst Indigenous peoples is not a result of colonialism, but instead a result of individual inadequacies. In framing Indigenous suffering as such, society is no longer the problem that needs to be reflected on and the circumstances Indigenous peoples find themselves in are nobody's fault but their own. "Non-Indigenous Canadians have become indifferent to Indigenous suffering" (Razack, 2015, p. 59). This denial of social injustice and presence of contemporary systemic racism and discrimination allows the systems of social inequality to continue to play out in subtle and, at times, not-so-subtle ways.

Media

Within contemporary Canadian society, there is an ongoing narrative concerning Indigenous people being shaped, in part, by the media. The media provides an important source of information through which citizens interpret, consider, and evaluate society and its residence (Mahtani, 2001). The inclusion, exclusion, and messaging around minorities play a crucial role in the creation of social identities (Henry, 1999) for both Indigenous people and societal perceptions of non-Indigenous people. "The media has continuously employed stereotypical narratives in their coverage and representations of Indigenous peoples, issues, and stories…including their dependency on welfare, alcohol and substance abuse, abusive violence towards one another, pervasive laziness and lack of ambition" (VanEvery, 2019, p. 2). The

underrepresentation of Indigenous content and the overrepresentation of media portrayal in a negative tone can best be described by Pierro's (2013) study Buried Voices: Media Coverage of Aboriginal Issues in Ontario. Between 2012 and 2013 in Ontario, only 0.46% of news media coverage focused on Indigenous people; the tone and how the Indigenous people were depictured in stories during this period was also measured, finding that 41% of the news stories had a neutral tone, 20% were positive and 39% were negative. When Indigenous people are included in news coverage, there is a documented propensity to them in a negative light. Likewise, according to Green (2006), "within the media…for the most part, Aboriginal peoples do not exist, except as practitioners of violence or political opposition, as marketing stereotypes, or as bearers of social pathologies" (p. 514). One's social identity becomes impacted when one is repeatedly portrayed in the media and through online platforms, as being inferior, unable to adapt, and as a burden on Canadian society.

Experiences in Education

Indigenous youth, urban or living on reserve, continue to have a complex relationship with the education system. As previously mentioned, approximately 43% of Indigenous people between the ages of 20 and 24 have not graduated from high school, when the figures include people living on reserve that number jumps to 58% (Statistics Canada, 2009). Working on the front lines with Indigenous youth in government care exposed me to the unique challenges they face in the education system. In my eight years working in the field, meeting hundreds of youths, I have only ever seen four or five youth who have graduated with a high school diploma. While lack of educational attainment does not necessarily create a negative self-image, it can be a precursor to future challenges and struggles as an adult. "Research has found numerous consequences associated with dropping out, including reduced lifetime earnings, poor health,

increased unemployment, delinquency, crime, substance abuse, economic dependency and reduced quality of life" (Hankivsky, 2008, p. 10). All of which negatively impact the ways in which one understands one's identity and relationships.

Battiste & Hampton (2002) concluded in their study Racism and the Effects on Indigenous Education, that Indigenous children in elementary, secondary, and post-secondary 'nearly' unanimously agreed that racism continues to be a problem and obstacle in their being successful in both school and employment (p. 3-4). While there are economic risks associated with low educational attainment levels as previously mentioned, the experiences Indigenous people have in the educational system continue to perpetuate negative messages regarding self-worth and Indigenous identity. The racism they are experiencing in classrooms encourages self-rejection (Amberly, 1997), support the internalization of negative feelings related to stereotypes, and lower self-esteem which makes it difficult in establishing tribal self-identity and pride in their Indianness (Hampton & Battiste, 2002).

Practical Justifications

This study will provide insight into the ways in which identity is developed or has been developed for Indigenous youth in an urban setting who have survived the Child Welfare system. Indigenous identity has been under attack throughout Canadian history, both historical and contemporary. The development of the Indian Act divided Indigenous peoples and was a tool used for forced assimilation. The Indian Residential Schools attempted to kill or abolish Indigenous ways of knowing and being through various forms of violence. The Sixties Scoop removed Indigenous children to non-Indigenous families, attempting to destroy Indigenous kinship ties. Currently, our Child Welfare System is carrying on this colonial agenda. Indigenous

children are still being separated from their families and communities and the result of 150 years of policy has created complex and multilayered oppression. The literature identifies several challenges to developing a positive cultural identity including difficulty with housing, experiences of socio-economic racism due to existing systemic inequity, internalized oppression resulting from the negative media portrayal, and racism within the education system. So, now what? Where do we go from here?

The literature portrays Indigenous peoples as 'dying,' in socio-economic distress, and struggling. This study was conducted to highlight the resilience Indigenous people have and the creative ways in which they have maintained a connection to their Indigenous ways of knowing and being. I hope this work will lead to a critical analysis of our existing policies and procedures concerning how we support positive Indigenous identity development in our institutions, agencies, and society. Within my own experiences, reconnection with culture made a significant positive change in my life. The ceremonies, the language, and the community were all essential in maintaining my sobriety, finding my place to belong, and uncovering my purpose and direction. Understanding urban Indigenous identity development for survivors of the Child Welfare system can have practical implications for community initiatives such as what programs have been effective, where we focus our resources, and what can we continue to do or develop to provide meaningful services to Indigenous children, youth, and families. This information can help us understand what has been useful for Indigenous children in care and, therefore, how can we better serve them. While we can establish panels as we want, create working groups, or review the literature, why can't we ask them directly? What are their thoughts?

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

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Kelsey Reed...
  Bill C-31 6-2 Status Indian
                      Queer
                      Female
                   Bi-Racial
                 Off-Reserve
                       Urban
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me.

An Indigenous research methodology was an appropriate methodology for this study because it focused on giving voice to Indigenous people and conducting research in a way that was "a source of enrichment to their lives and not a source of depletion or denigration (Weber-Pillwax, 1999)". The relationship between Indigenous people and academic research has historically been a negative experience within Indigenous communities due to exploitation, historical marginalization, and misrepresentation (Kwame, 2017; Drawson, Toombs & Mushquash, 2017; Chiblow, 2020; Whiskeyjack & Napier, 2021) by non-Indigenous researchers. The Western scientific approach to research focuses on problems and often imposes outside solutions instead of appreciating and expanding upon the resources available within Indigenous communities (Wilson, 2008). An Indigenous research methodology addresses Smith's (1999) concerns about Indigenous voices and stories going untold and being misinterpreted, reinforcing that "it is time for Aboriginal peoples and Indigenous research to break free from the hegemony of the dominant system, into a place where we are deciding or own research agendas" (Wilson, 2008, p.17). Furthermore, Indigenous research methodologies become a process of rewriting and re-righting history (Snow et. al, 2015; Smith, 1999; Absolon, 2011)

"Giving Voice"

The process of giving voice to an Indigenous person in the context of this research does not imply that Indigenous people did not have a voice nor support the idea that one person (the researcher) can give voice. Indigenous peoples have always had a voice; however, colonial policies and social structures have persistently attempted to silence it.

Reflecting on my own experiences as an Indigenous youth, the concept of having a voice did not become apparent to me until I was in my twenties. The education system was founded on a Eurocentric worldview of binary thinking of right/wrong, win/lose, white/not white, straight/not straight, etc. Growing up in a community where I was othered at every turn, I quickly learned that when I was asked about my thoughts or experiences, those in authority were not actually asking me. Classrooms became a challenge I needed to survive, rather than a space of open dialogue. Speak only when spoken to, give minimal responses, disengage, and survive. Speak up and I risked being ridiculed, minimized, or ignored. My mother was frequently called into the school by teachers and administrators, and they begged her to have me tested for both learning disabilities and behavioural problems. "Kelsey has great potential, but…" became a recurring theme throughout elementary, junior high, and high school. Reflecting on this now, my problem was not my inability to think but my inability and refusal to think the way they wanted me to.

The first time I felt heard was when I was introduced to the sharing circle process. A sharing circle is an Indigenous approach to relational engagement that allows participants to respectfully share and listen to other perspectives (Hart, 2002). Individuals come together in a circle and are each given an opportunity to speak in relation to the sharing circle topic. Sharing circles utilize a circular worldview, address balance among participants, can promote personal and community healing, explore a particular issue or topic, and stimulate reflections from

participants (Hart, 2002; Lavallee, 2009). I experienced sharing circles in the Indigenous rehabilitation facility I attended, through A.A. meetings, then heavily throughout graduate school. In the first sharing circle I attended, we had just finished smudging and we were sitting with an Elder. We were given some guidelines: share whatever it is you are feeling or thinking, share when the feather makes its way to you, and listen to whoever is speaking. It was founded on principles of trust, relationality, listening, and respect. As the feather was handed to me, I felt overwhelmed. I cried, my hands were shaking, and I was only able to get out a few sentences. I had been conditioned for so long to avoid sharing my thoughts and experiences with others that when I tried to there was a physical reaction. This was the beginning of my own process of finding my voice, a process of unlearning survival techniques that I needed growing up.

My own experiences heavily influenced how I conducted this research with the Indigenous participants in this study. Giving voice from an Indigenous perspective is about renewing our understanding of power (Horton & Freire, 1984) and returning to traditional ways of relationality.

Defining Power

Power is understood in this context as political power. As noted throughout the literature review of this research proposal, Indigenous peoples have been subjected to several policies that undermine their capabilities in determining how they choose to live. A foreign system was imposed onto Indigenous peoples through the implementation of mandatory attendance of all Indigenous children at Indian Residential Schools. On several occasions, I have been asked by non-Indigenous people why the parents agreed to send their children to the schools even though they knew of the poor conditions they would be living in. The answer is simple: the government

exercised political power over the Indigenous parents and any refusal would result in incarceration.

Renewing our understanding of power in this study means acknowledging that the participants are the experts on their own lives and respecting that Indigenous people can make their own decisions without government interference. Coming into the interviews with participants is the same as entering into a sharing circle: we are all respected, we are all valued, and no voice is valued more than another. This research is aiming to pass the feather to survivors of the Child Welfare system and respect their turn to share.

Indigenous Worldview

In this study, I was working from an Indigenous paradigm. A paradigm is our set of underlying beliefs that guide and shape our actions (Wilson, 2008). Paradigms are frameworks, from which we see, interpret, and understand the world…influenced by culture, socialization, and our experiences (Absolon, 20011; Kovach, 2009). "An Indigenous paradigm is made up of an Indigenous ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology" (Louis, 2014, p. 97). My paradigm is deeply embedded in my socialization (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); is "grounded in the self, the spirit, and the unknown" (Ermine, 1995, p. 108); and comes from the foundational belief that knowledge is relational (Wilson, 2008). I understand the world through relationships of all living forms (Steinhauer, 2008). We are all interconnected and there is an inherit responsibility for creating change (Absolon, 2011). My experiences as a Queer Indigenous scholar and worker within the Child Welfare system have impacted my process, motives, and purpose for conducting this research study.

Our ontological assumptions are the beliefs we have about the nature of reality (Wilson, 2008). While many research paradigms discuss ontology, epistemology, axiology, and

methodology as four distinct areas that are explored separately, the Indigenous paradigm understands these elements in constant relation to each other. "This fragmentation of the constituents of existence in the Western ideology has invariably led to a vicious circle of atomistic thinking that restricts the capacity for holism" (Ermine, 1995, p. 103). In this study, the ontological assumption is that reality is relational; reality is relationships or a set of relationships (Wilson, 2008). Our relationships are not limited to other people but include the land, ideas, and the cosmos (Wilson, 2008). The assumption that reality and truth are obtained relationally has impacts on the methods that were used within this research process. In an Indigenous paradigm, knowledge is learned and reproduced through the process of: "listening, sensing, viewing, reviewing, reading, watching, waiting, observing, exchanging, sharing, conceptualizing, assessing, modeling and applying" (Martin, 2003, p. 9). Because ontological claims are inevitably linked with epistemological claims it is difficult to discuss them separately (Crotty, 1998).

Indigenous epistemology is the study of the nature and attainment of knowledge, which is described in the literature as holistic, encompassing the intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual realms (Hanohano, 1999; Ermine, 1995; Absolon, 2011). "An Indigenous epistemology constitutes our system of knowledge which is made up of our cultures, worldviews, histories, and spirituality as well as the relationships with people established within that system" (Kwane, 2017, p. 2). Our ways of being in the world (epistemology) are influenced by our beliefs of what is real in the world (ontology). My Cree epistemology influenced this study by including the holistic and relational qualities in my preparation for and conduction of this research, in my documentation of the sources and methods of my knowing (Kovach, 2015), and through emphasizing the necessity for relational accountability in my work (Wilson, 2008).

From an Indigenous perspective, relationality and "relational accountability are foundational components of the research methodology and… a core to all traditional Indigenous peoples" (Steinhauer, 2008, p. 40). To be relational extends beyond the person sitting in front of you: it is an understanding that we are all interconnected. My well-being is directly impacted and dependent on the well-being of everything around me. The relationships we develop with community members, animals, and the land are sacred. The importance of these relationships in an Indigenous research framework and the responsibility it evokes, requires time, earning trust, respect, following protocol, and constant reflection of ethical considerations (Kovach, 2012; Archibald, 2008). To be in relationship with the participants is not simply about asking burning questions we wish to resolve, but rather answering a call to be of use (Meyer, 2003).

My role is not to be an expert but an oskâpêwis, creating a space for others to share their truths. An oskâpêwis, "is a sacred helper, male and female, who leads the way for any nehiyaw (Cree) gathering, event, or ceremony" (McAdams, 2015, p. 21). The role of an oskâpêwis carries profound and "sacred responsibilities guided by nehiyaw laws, protocols and methodologies" (McAdams, 2015, p. 21) in Cree communities. As this study is grounded in an Indigenous research methodology, I see and understand the research process as a ceremony. As a researcher, I am entering into a sacred space with the participants and I understand my role as creating an environment of respect and reciprocity. As an oskâpêwis in this research process, humbly admitting I am in the process of learning, I have a responsibility to ensure that protocol is followed, and participants are cared for.

When I was in my early twenties, I was talking to an Elder in my workplace about how I was interested in learning more about cultural ceremony. She listened to me speak for a while and asked me to meet her on the Enoch reserve at eight am the following day. So, the following

day, I drove up to our meeting spot at eight am and she was sitting in a lawn chair waiting for me to arrive. I got out of the car, and she handed me a pitchfork and said, "you better get started because the women's sweat starts at eleven". That morning she walked me through how to prepare a sweat from beginning to end. How to prepare the fire and the rocks, how to clean up the space so the women would be comfortable, the order of things, and the meaning of what we were doing. I was humbled by the process and continued to be an oskâpêwis for women's sweats for this Elder for years following. These experiences learning from this Elder inform how I understand relationality and continue to shape my Indigenous worldview. It taught me about responsibility to the community, intentionality in every decision I make, doing things in a good way, and how I can be of use to others.

My understanding of relationality and worldview has also been influenced by my Child and Youth Care practice and my time spent working with Indigenous youth in residential group homes. Working with youth in their life space through some of their toughest moments greatly expanded my understanding of what it means to provide support. The relationships I had with those youth allowed me to explore my own vulnerabilities and oftentimes I found myself crying with them. Whether they were working through identity loss, struggling with feelings of powerlessness, or processing a suicide within their family, it was those conversations that led me to this research. Those experiences taught me that relationships, in Child and Youth Care, as an instructor, and in research, require unconditional love for the people you are serving. The root of all relationships, regardless of context, is unwavering, unconditional love. To love others is to see them. To love them is to hear them. To love them is to sit with them in that space.

Data-Collection Process

Choosing a Method

Through informal interactions with the two Edmonton social service agencies, I reached out to two executive directors with whom I have previously worked with. The two executive directors were approached to identify potential participants and they both agreed to support the research study. They provided names of former clients their agency has served, and I reached out to those clients. The identified potential participant all initially agreed to participate; however, upon following up with them, we were not able to conduct any interviews. I then reached out to previously established relationships I had with community members that I met through ceremonies over the past several years, as well to as other Child and Youth Care Practitioners whom I met in academic settings.

Interviews

With an emphasis on relationship, this research study used open structured methods, which allowed me to intuitively respond to the participants' stories, to share my own understandings when deemed appropriate, and to allow the me to be an active listener (Kovach, 2009). Using an open-structured method within the context of an Indigenous paradigm, the researcher was seen as part of a web of relationships (Wilson, 2008) and could not be removed. Therefore, throughout the research process, I reflected on the most effective methods that would enhance communication, relied on mutual thinking and collaboration, and selected creative methods when possible (Weber-Pillwax, 2004). Methods that were used for this study were focused on narrative and storytelling (Weber-Pillwax, 2004). The intention of this study was to understand the participants' experiences in and through interactions with the Child Welfare system and the impacts this had on their Indigenous identity development. I selected the methods of using narrative and storytelling because I wanted to understand the participants' oral

history, oral history being understood as "a particular aspect of an individual's experience that pertains to the research topic at hand" (Kovach, 2012, p. 96). Storytelling, or story sharing situated the participants' experiences with a collective memory and was grounded within a relationship-based approach (Kovach, 2012; Weber-Pillwax, 2004). With each participant, when I was beginning the research process, I began with self-location. I situated myself within my community and I explained my motivations for research and my relationship to the research topic as a Child and Youth Care Practitioner (Kovach, 2012). Using narrative in privileging and giving space to story while knowledge-seeking for this study, I conducted interviews that applied a conversational format which allowed me to ask questions and be reflexive (Kovach, 2012).

I participated as both an insider and an outsider in the interview process. Working from a Cree epistemology, attention to inward knowing was not optional because all we can know for sure is our own experience (Kovach, 2009). While some paradigmatic positions believe that researchers should be an observer and avoid contaminating the data, an Indigenous research methodology does not believe that objectivity is possible nor the desired outcome. We develop relationships with the communities and the ideas we engage with, and that relationship is seen as valuable and not detrimental to our study. "Inward knowledges are equally important within Indigenous inquiry, and so the methods included these types of knowing so that they become a formal part of the meaning-making aspect of our research" (Kovach, 2009, p. 126). Furthermore, my experiences were included in the data collection in this research. While actively engaging in conversations with the participants, I included and documented empirical knowledge gained through watching and listening (Steinhauer, 2007) to the participants and the environment.

Community Selection

Urban Setting- Edmonton, Alberta

According to the 2022 Municipal census, Edmonton currently has a population of 1,087,803 (Government of Alberta, 2023). Edmonton resides on Treaty 6 territory and is home to a diverse demographic. The city of Edmonton was selected because it is accessible to the researcher and represents a large metropolitan city. According to the 2011 federal Canadian census, Alberta is home to 16% (220,997) of the Aboriginals identified, and of the 16%, 1 in 4 lived in Edmonton (Statistics Canada, 2015). As the participants have been involved with the Child Welfare System, many of them live away from their respective communities' and/or reservations. Each participant is a registered band member; however, they have spent relatively little time living in those communities. Two of the participants only spent a few years living, working, and studying in their community, while one participant has only visited for certain occasions such as funerals and socializing with relatives.

Their experiences are not uncommon and many Indigenous children and youth in the Child Welfare system are moved to and/or raised in large urban settings. As noted in the literature review, Indigenous families move from their reservations to urban settings due to housing shortages on reserve, to seek out employment and higher education, and to be closer to other family members (Environics Institute, 2010; Brandon & Peters, 2014; Caryle, 2014). Indigenous children and youth are also often apprehended and moved to larger urban settings because there are more resources available, such as placements, Child and Family Services offices, and case workers. The City of Edmonton currently has 17 Child and Family Services offices and accounts for 22% of all Child and Family Services offices in the province of Alberta (Government of Alberta, 2021). To put this in perspective, there are 17 offices in Edmonton and there are only 20 Designated First Nations Agencies for all Indigenous Reservations in the entire

Province of Alberta (Government of Alberta, 2021). As a result, many Indigenous children and youth are moved to urban settings, specifically to the City of Edmonton with its numerous offices and resources acting as a hub for neighbouring Indigenous reserves.

In my experience as a Child and Youth Care practitioner and accounted through participants interviews, residential group homes care for Indigenous youth from around the province as well as from across the country. If there were six youth living in the residential group home, it was not uncommon for them all to be from different Indigenous communities. Luciann shared a story as a practitioner who even provided services for a youth who was brought to Edmonton from the Northwest Territories for a placement. The community of Indigenous youth with involvement in the Child Welfare System in Edmonton is made up of youth from several different communities across the province and the country.

Population and Location

Within the Indigenous population in Alberta, nearly half (49%) of Indigenous people were under the age of 25 (Statistics Canada, 2015). This study sought participants that were between the ages of 25-35 for several reasons. First, including participants under the age of 18 further complicates the ethics application and dynamics of researcher and participant. If the participants were under the age of 18, they would still be accessing services such as residential group homes and transitional housing for young adults, and/or still have an ongoing relationship with a designated social worker. Second, I chose to study the lived experiences of 25-35 years old participants because I wanted to hear about their experiences with the Child Welfare System in its entirety. Meaning, I wanted to understand their stories and lived experiences within the Child Welfare System from the apprehension process until they aged out of care and were living independently as adults. Interviewing participants aged 25-35, specifically participants over the

age of 25, ensured that the participants would have aged out of support services associated with the Child Welfare System. Interviewing the participants as adults allowed them more time to reflect and process their experiences and able to see their experiences in its entirety.

Recruitment of Participants

Following ethics approval from the University of Alberta REB, three participants were identified through purposeful sampling for my study. This research employed a homogenous sampling method to select participants, as the research question focuses on a specific demographic of urban Indigenous youth and their lived experiences. An invitation letter was provided to the selected participants that included a formal introduction, information regarding the intent and purpose of the study, an estimated timeline of the interview process, the question (s) I was seeking to answer, and my contact information to answer any questions they may have. As part of the University of Alberta process for conducting research, I explained the consent forms to the participants and answered any questions that they may have.

The three participants selected for the study were of Indigenous descent; between the ages of 25- 35, with one participant being older; had lived in a large urban setting for most of their life and had prior involvement with Child and Family Services (Child Welfare System). The selection of participants-included three women and one participant who identified as a member of the LGBTQ2+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, Queer, and Two-Spirit) community.

In selecting participants, I was unable to identify any male participants, though I initially planned to do so. The participants brought forward by community members were all female andI was unable to locate any male participants. Additionally, regarding the age demographic I was seeking (25-35), one of the participants was 24 during our first interview and turned 25 while we

were conducting the interviews. My third participant was 44 years old, which is older than I intended to interview. When I initially spoke to her about my research study, this participant showed great interest in contributing to this discussion. She was older; however, she had the lived experience I was looking for and she was currently working in the Child and Youth Care profession. She stated that she had so much to say on the topic and it was very important to her as a practicing Child and Youth Care worker. In alignment with an Indigenous research methodology, I decided to honour her voice and passion for supporting Indigenous youth in the Child Welfare system even though she was older that my cut-off, believing her experiences as a youth in care and a practitioner could contribute to this study.

Cultural Protocol

Prior to conducting any interviews with participants, I offered them protocol to begin the process in a good way. "That term, protocol, refers to any one of a number of culturally ordained actions and statements, established by an ancient tradition, that an individual completes to establish a relationship with another person from whom the individual makes a request" (Lightning, 1993, p. 216). While the specific protocols can vary from community to community, I was responsible to identify the proper protocol to approach these knowledge holders within their communities. Absolon (2011) further states that the "questioning and sharing of ideas through speaking, writing, and publishing can be accomplished more appropriately by greater attention to etiquette, or the ethics of personal relationships (p. 65). Proper etiquette for exchanging knowledge, in other words conducting research, involved different forms of protocol including the offering of tobacco or cloth and/or participation in traditional ceremonies. Depending on "the circumstances of the request and the community, the protocol can be simple or extremely complex involving extensive preparation" (Lightning, 1993, p. 216).

The participants for this study were from three different Cree communities, and I also made assumptions about their understanding the purpose and intention of offering protocol. Given the nature of this study, the participants I was seeking were survivors of the Child Welfare system and had experienced disruption in their connections with their communities, families, and culture. For Cree protocol in some communities, we offer print (cloth), tobacco, and sweetgrass. "This cloth is usually broadcloth, one to two meters long…the colour depends on the circumstance…and when they are accepted this signifies acceptance of the invitation or assent to the proposition stated in the message" (McAdams, 2015, p. 42). I offered the participants tobacco, which is considered one of the most sacred plants to many Indigenous communities on Turtle Island (Lavallee, 2009). Tobacco is offered when you are requesting knowledge or help from a community member, and this is done to ensure that this request is made in a good and respectful way (Lavellee, 2009). When I inquired about their preferences regarding protocol and procedure, the participants had varying degrees of understanding about the exchange, and some were unaware of the protocol process entirely. One participant had a lot of experience with the process, one participant stated that they had seen protocol being offered before but had never received protocol themselves, and one participant stated that they have never seen or been a part of this type of exchange before. I decided that I would offer each participant tobacco and cloth and explained to them that I was making this offering because I was grateful for the sharing of their experiences and knowledge for this research study. I explained my understanding of offering protocol and how it is a traditional custom in Indigenous communities.

Ethics

In this research, this study followed the procedures of applying and adhering to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. This research

conducted all its affairs with the three core principles: Respect for persons, which recognizes the intrinsic values of human beings and the respect and considerations that they are due; concern for welfare, meaning the researcher will aim to protect the welfare of participants and to promote that welfare in any foreseeable risks associated with the research; and justice, referring to the obligation of the researcher to treat people fairly and equitably (Canadian Institutes of Health Research Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2014). This focus ensured that the research was conducted in an ethical manner and upheld my goal to enrich the lives of the participants and not harm them in any way.

Because this research involved interviewing Indigenous peoples, special considerations were taken to ensure that cultural and ethical conduct was honoured. Alongside the ethical considerations that were taken according to the post-secondary institutions, this research was also respectful and adhered to Indigenous natural laws and traditions. Indigenous axiology is based upon the concept of relational accountability, and Weber-Pillwax (2001) adds that we must "follow the three Rs of that accountability: respect, reciprocity, and responsibility in our relationships with Aboriginal communities" (Wilson, 2008, p, 77).

In this study, Elders of the community were consulted for the direction of the study, process, ceremony, and cultural protocols (Lavallee, 2009). Elders are considered the backbone of Indigenous communities because they are the keepers of the language and possess traditional cultural knowledge (Chiblow, 2020). Elders allude to formal and long-established ways, procedures, and processes of First Nations persons that are required to strictly follow when "seeking particular kinds of knowledge that are rooted in spiritual traditions and laws" (Castellano, 2004, p. 103). During this study, I maintained an ongoing relationship with three

community Elders and knowledge keepers throughout each stage of the research study process. These Elders have provided me ongoing support through my studies, as a Child and Youth Care practitioner working in the field, and through my own experiences of ceremony in my community for several years. While these Elders were not interviewed for this study, they supported me at the beginning and completion of each stage of the process. Ceremonies were essential for me as a researcher as they kept me grounded throughout the process of developing, proposing, and facilitating this research study. For each stage of the research: the coursework; the development of my proposal; the data collection; and data analysis; I would attend a ceremony with my supporting Elders and would make an offering of print and tobacco. I participated in the Sun Dance ceremonies, Sweat Lodges, and medicine picking to begin the next phase of the research study. These Elders sat with me, and we prayed together. This form of cultural grounding was how I nourished my spirit during my research, and in turn, nourished the research itself (Kovach, 2012). I find it difficult to articulate how the support they provided allowed me to continue forward and the connection to spirit that was so essential in this process.

Child and Youth Care Ethical Considerations

As a Child and Youth Care practitioner working within the Child and Youth Care field for several years, there is another layer of ethical considerations that were incorporated into this research. Working with young people in various capacities warrants a professional code of conduct that extends beyond the time you spend working within that particular social services agency. During the intake process of a child/youth into a program for support services, as a worker, you have access to all the files and documentation that have followed that individual throughout their life. These files contain very sensitive information about that individual and

often their families. As I entered this research, it was essential that I continued to honour previous clients and their families' rights to confidentiality and privacy.

This is particularly important during the participant selection process, meaning I would not be interviewing previous clients. Selecting participants for this study that I have previously worked with would be unethical for several reasons. First, working with youth as a practitioner, I had access to privileged information that legally cannot be shared (Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, 2019). I was granted access to this information by the courts to provide effective services to the youth in care, thus, to use that information to advance my own research study would be unethical. Second, because I had a relationship with the youth in a caregiver capacity there would be an inherent power imbalance, and they could potentially feel pressured to participate in the research study. Finally, because I had access to the client's court documents, provided services for them as a caregiver, and knew their family history, my perception of them would be impacted before we even began the interview. This could have potentially impacted my interactions with the participant and/or skewed the data analysis.

Trustworthiness

In conducting this study and using an Indigenous research methodology, there were several strategies and techniques that were employed to establish trustworthiness. For this study, I utilized member-checking, reflexive journals, and transferability by providing thick descriptions.

In an Indigenous Research Methodology, because it is relational and the participants are co-composing with the researcher, member checking was a technique utilized at various points within the research process. When the data was collected from a participant, there was

interpretation as to what was being said and what the researcher and the participant understood the data to mean. Member-checking throughout the research process allowed the participant an immediate opportunity to challenge any wrong interpretations I may have had (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). That relational accountability required the researcher to ensure they were representing the participant's data in an accurate way. "The Elders remind to us to take time in order to ensure correct representation of their Indigenous knowledge and is an example of engaging in both decolonization and transformative-action process" (Archibald, 2008, p. 90). When using an Indigenous research methodology, my relationship with the Edmonton Indigenous community was a valued component of my work (Wilson, 2008), and therefore the participants' interpretations and experiences are a living part of the research.

In this study, I developed a reflexive journal where I documented my own thoughts on the process of my interpretations and was used to document the methodological decisions that were made and their reasons for being made (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reflexivity was an important aspect of this research process. I was required to employ personal transparency and vulnerability with community members, which required ongoing self-reflection of my own biases, responses, and commitment to giving back to participants (Snow et. al, 2016). Following each session with participants, I would document in a reflexive journal my own emotional responses, the reasoning for decisions that were made during the interview, and any thoughts that came up for me that needed to be considered or further explored.

In utilizing a small sample size and considering the methodology that informed this study, the goal was not to establish absolute truths that apply to all urban Indigenous youth who have been involved with the Child Welfare system. This, in this study, I did not create an index

of transferability but provided the proper elements of the study through a thick description for others to make the judgments of whether the study can be applicable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thick descriptions are detailed and dense vignettes of the participants' experiences, intended to provide the necessary information for understanding their context and determining transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thick descriptions provide detailed information about the participants, the context in which the study was completed, and the historical factors that have influenced the participant responses. It will be up to other scholars to determine whether these research findings are applicable to another context, however, it is also important to note that Aboriginal knowledge is rooted in personal experiences and lays no claim to universality (Castellano, 2000).

Selecting Participants

In selecting participants for this study, in alignment with the methodology and the heavy emphasis on relationship and relationality, I relied on previous relationships I had within the Edmonton and area Indigenous community prior to beginning this research. Before I reached out to anyone as a potential participant, I wanted to ensure that I would be starting in a good way and that I was respecting the Indigenous protocols of beginning such a project. After completing my candidacy exam, the following week I attended a Sweat Lodge ceremony, just outside of Edmonton on the Enoch reserve, that was being hosted with community Cree Elders. It was during this ceremony that I offered print and tobacco to a community Elder, whom I have known for years both as a student and a Child and Youth Care practitioner, to provide the spiritual guidance and grounding to begin identifying and connecting with potential participants. Additionally, I went medicine picking with both my supervisor as well as a community knowledge keeper and picked the sweet grass that would be given to the participants at the

beginning of my study. Attending ceremonies before and during the research process, supported me for each stage of the study. The ceremonies helped me ground my mind and heart in Cree culture (Hart, 2007).

Upon getting my REB approval to conduct my study, I then began to reach out to individuals within the community whom I had met through Indigenous ceremonies. Once participants were identified, I approached potential participants one at a time and explained the study through a conversation and my introductory letter. I gave them a few days to think about it and then would follow up. When I did not hear back from the potential participants I "accepted this as an indirect way of expressing their unwillingness to participate" (Steinhauer, 2008, p. 44).

In reviewing the introductory letter and research consent forms, I explained to the participants that they were able to withdraw from the study at any time and that their identities would be protected using vignettes and pseudonyms. Two of the participants decided that they would like to use their real identities. The third provided their spiritual name. She stated that "those who know me will know that this is my story". Because the participants stated that they wanted to keep their names or spiritual name in the study, I honoured that. "For me to remove their names from their stories and teachings is disrespectful…it gives the appearance that those words are mine…this would destroy the relationship…and totally out of keeping with proper protocol and etiquette" (Steinhauer, 2007, p. 82).

In the participant selection, it is important to note how the COVID-19 Global Pandemic added another layer of complexity to the process. Because I was unable to meet with participants face-to-face due to health restrictions, the previously established relationship component was essential in finding participants for this study. Protocol was offered within social distancing requirements and all our interactions were required to take place through Zoom.

In my previous experience with research, sitting with someone face-to-face, and sharing a meal or cup of tea were important aspects of the relationship-building process. Considering COVID-19, I needed to adapt and be able to express my intentions, listen actively, and read and respond to non-verbal cues through a computer screen, which was difficult at times.

The Participants

Participant 1- Bush Rock Woman

Bush Rock Woman is a 25-year-old Cree woman that is currently residing in the Edmonton area. She identifies as two-spirit and is the eldest of five siblings. *Bush Rock Woman* and her siblings had a longstanding relationship with the Child Welfare system, residing in foster, kinship, and residential group home placements over the span of fourteen years. The participant and her siblings were initially apprehended from their mother due to her struggles with substance abuse, her lack of stable housing, and reported domestic violence between herself and their father. Directly after apprehension, the children were placed in emergency placements, Temporary Guardianship Orders were mandated by the courts, and *Bush Rock Woman*'s mother actively worked with a caseworker to get her children back. Over time, *Bush Rock Woman*'s mother was unable to overcome the challenges she was experiencing, and the children were then placed under Permanent Guardianship Orders.

Upon apprehension, the five siblings were split up and placed in the foster care system. The placements were usually for short periods of time, with non-Indigenous families, and spread in and around the city of Edmonton. After years of being shuffled through the foster care system in this way, the children were placed with an extended family member on their reserve. The kinship placement was initially stable; however, after a few months of living with the family, the children were then exposed to mental, physical, and spiritual abuse within the household. *Bush*

Rock Woman stated that the placement was not the best for her and her siblings, but it did allow them to attend the same school for four years, build connections with friends and teachers, and play sports. School became a safe place for Rock Bush Woman and her siblings.

During this four-year period, there were several significant events that occurred that impacted *Bush Rock Woman*'s and her sibling's path. While *Bush Rock Woman* was living with her family members on reserve, *Bush Rock Woman*'s mother passed away suddenly and tragically. Another significant event that occurred during this placement occurred when *Bush Rock Woman* and her siblings met Jack and Terri. Jack was a Cree teacher at her school and was involved in the school's sports teams. Jack would often look out for the siblings by providing rides home, bringing them lunches when he noticed they didn't have anything to eat, and giving them water and Gatorade at their sporting events. This was the beginning of an ongoing, positive, and supportive relationship between the siblings and Jack and Terri.

The placement with family broke down after four years and the children were all placed in a residential group home. Bush Rock Woman was able to stay there for a brief period and then was forced to enter a Semi-Independent Living (SIL) program back in Edmonton. In the SIL program, Buch Rock Woman began using substances, not attending school, and surrounding herself with people who were active in addition. When things really began to spiral out of control, Bush Rock Woman was asked to return to her community to live with Jack and Terri who by then were providing care for her siblings. The strong relationship that she developed with Jack and Terri was very positive and influential for Bush Rock Woman as she transitioned out of the Child Welfare system and into adulthood.

Bush Rock Woman completed high school and went on to complete some post-secondary courses in Social Work. She is now residing in Edmonton and living off and on with her biological siblings.

Participant 2- Robyn

Robyn is a 29-year-old woman that is currently living and working in the Edmonton area. Robyn is one of five children and has had a relationship with the Child Welfare system for most of her life, both as a child navigating the system and currently as a Child and Youth Care practitioner. Robyn is a band member of a community in Saskatchewan; however, she has lived and worked all over Alberta throughout her life. Robyn and her siblings were initially apprehended from their mother and father's care when Robyn was four years old due to concerns about substance use in the home, housing insecurity, and her father eventually being sent to prison for attempted murder charges. The siblings were split up and received several placements within foster care, residential group homes, Temporary Semi-Independent Living and Semi-Independent Living programs.

The children were initially split up and resided in emergency placements around the city of Edmonton. After two years of shuffling the kids from place to place, the three younger siblings would be reunited with the two older siblings when a set of foster parents advocated keeping all the siblings together in one household. The foster family they were placed with originally had five biological siblings, making the family unit 10 children in total. The foster family would move around the province for the father's employment, was deeply religious, and homeschooled all ten children. This was a very structured environment for the children and many of these experiences were reflected on at length in understanding Robyn's Indigenous identity development throughout the interviews.

The family would eventually move to a Hamlet just outside of Edmonton and this was noted as the beginning of the placement breakdown for Robyn and her siblings. As the children aged into teenagers, there began to be some problems within the household with physical altercations, substance use, and mental health concerns. Robyn noted three separate incidents that led to the children being placed into alternative placements one by one. The siblings were placed into group homes in and around Edmonton. Robyn stated that it was the transition out of the foster home and into a group home and SIL placements that was the beginning of her concerning behaviours. Robyn began drinking, using drugs, and struggling with school. Robyn would live in SIL programs until she aged out of the system at 18. As a young adult, Robyn resided with her biological father for a short period of time and then lived independently. It was around this period of young adulthood that Robyn's biological mother tragically passed away from substance use-related issues.

 Robyn was able to make some strong connections to youth workers and was able to complete her schooling, both a high school diploma and a bachelor's degree in Child and Youth Care. Robyn is now a practitioner in the Child and Youth Care profession and works in a T-SIL program.

Participant 3- Luciann

Luciann is a 44-year-old mother of seven and a member of a southern Alberta Indigenous community. Luciann has been involved with the Child Welfare system for many years, both as a youth accessing services as well as a practitioner. Throughout Luciann's childhood, she had placements in foster care, group homes, SIL, and living with relatives. In her earlier years she lived with her biological mother, her aunt Katherine, and her grandparents. Luciann had strong

connections with her aunt and grandparents, and they were rooted in an Indigenous way of being, which Luciann remembers fondly and identifies as influential in her own identity development.

At the age of 15, Luciann and her biological mother came to an agreement that she would be placed into the Child Welfare system. Luciann identified a strained relationship with her biological mother, as they would often experience altercations or disagreements. She was placed with a woman who was also caring for other youth around the same age. Luciann would continue her schooling and appreciated living with the family as it provided her a different life, structure, and family activities. Luciann would finish grade ten before her placement eventually broke down due to altercations with other youth in the placement. From this point on, Luciann would transition between her mother's house, partners' homes, and eventually a SIL placement.

Luciann went to Inner City High School to complete grade eleven, which she admits that she needed to do twice. She became pregnant in May of her second attempt and decided to take her son back from her mother and was living in an apartment. Luciann stated that these were hard times, taking her child to daycare and then finishing her schooling. It was around this time that she met Brad. Soon after they became pregnant and after losing her apartment in the city, they decided to move to Wabasca where they would live for seven years. Luciann stated she wanted to move back to the city but doing so was difficult. She eventually would become a lifeguard in Wabasca, she applied and was accepted to the University of Alberta, and Brad joined a trade union. They moved back to Edmonton, where she took classes and B travelled to work in Fort McMurray. Luciann spoke about the challenges of attending school with young children and Brad leaving for work for 21 days at a time. She completed three years at the University of Alberta, but she fell behind and was unfortunately asked to leave. She would return to school in

2006 at Concordia for one semester, and then to MacEwan University to complete her bachelor's degree in Child and Youth Care.

Luciann would work within the Child and Youth Care community for several years and across several provinces. She began working as a youth worker in a women's shelter in Wabasca. She would work there for one year creating programming for kindergarten to grade twelve-aged children and youth. She was then employed by a local Edmonton agency and would provide support for teenage mothers and their babies in a residential group home setting. After completing her degree, Luciann completed an internship with an Indigenous community outside of Calgary and finally, she recently moved to Winnipeg to work as a caseworker.

Data Collection

After identifying participants for the study, I contacted them to have an informal discussion about the study, criteria, and what the process looks like. I then sent them both the introductory letter as well as the consent forms which provided a more detailed explanation of what they study was about. We then arranged a time when I was able to offer protocol (socially distanced) and set up our first interview.

In our first interview, I initiated a conversation that would open space for them to ask any questions and we went over the consent forms to ensure that I had both written and verbal confirmation that they understood that their option to withdraw, their entitlement to confidentiality, the process of member checking, and other critical components of the research. I kept a reflexive journal that documented every conversation and decision that was made throughout the process, as well as thoughts and questions that emerged before/during/after interviews along with follow-up questions for our next meeting.

The interviews took place over Zoom and varied in length from one hour to an hour and a half. Once I had received permission from the participant, I recorded the interviews using both video and audio recording options through the Zoom platform. Along with the recording, I actively took notes throughout the interviews to support my data analysis. I asked the following questions:

1) *Tell me about your experiences in the Child Welfare system.*

2) *What does Indigenous identity mean to you?*

3) *As a youth in care, in what ways did you feel supported/not supported in your Indigenous identity development?*

4) *What changes can be made in the Child Welfare field to support positive Indigenous identity for children and youth in care?*

Depending on the participant, we would sometimes only get through one, maybe two, question(s) per session. We would begin our next session reviewing what we had discussed in the previous meeting, and I would ask the participant to confirm that what I had noted was accurate and offer them the opportunity to expand where they felt necessary.

Chapter 4: Data Presentation

Kelsey Reed…
Bill C-31 6-2 Status Indian
Queer
Female
Bi-Racial
Off-Reserve
Urban

me.

Within this chapter, I will present the data I gathered regarding the lived experiences and perspectives of urban Indigenous survivors of the child welfare system. The chapter will be contextualized within the theoretical framework explored in Chapter 1 (p. 12) of this dissertation. The three components that make up the theoretical framework include the role of policy (including government, agency, and institutional policy); being in relation to others (which will include family and friends), and one's own understanding of one's Indigenous identity.

The research question, as stated in Chapter 1, is as follows: "How do urban Indigenous survivors of the Child Welfare system feel about their identity development?". To further engage the participants, I asked a series of questions in a conversational format: What are your experiences in the child welfare system? How do you define or understand Indigenous identity? As a youth in care, in what ways did you feel supported/not supported in your Indigenous identity development? What changes can be made in the Child Welfare System to support positive Indigenous identity for children and youth in care? Throughout the interviews, I would ask probing questions, request that the participant clarify and expand on certain statements and explore follow-up questions in the next interview which I developed after transcribing my

notes. Two days prior to our second and third interviews, I would email the participant with notes from our previous interview, which allowed them the opportunity to review and correct any misunderstandings or misinterpretations.

Policy

For this section of the data presentation, I will be discussing how policy has impacted the participants' Indigenous identity development.

Placements with Religious Affiliations and/or Non-Indigenous Placements

Bush Rock Woman

Bush Rock Woman and her siblings were required to live in several different placements throughout their childhoods and were placed in non-Indigenous households. She stated that they stayed with families who were Christian, Buddhist, Vietnamese, and Caucasian. According to *Bush Rock Woman*, these varied placements taught her how to adapt to whatever environment she was living in and how to survive. "Even if you didn't align with the beliefs of the family, you do whatever you need to do to survive…they go to church, you go to church…they pray, you close your eyes and look like you are praying". *Bush Rock Woman* shared that so doing: "made it hate myself even more…I was gay, in a Christian home…I use to go to church and think, you know, if you are gay you are going to hell…I use to think, oh my god, why am I the way I am?" *Bush Rock Woman* shared a very personal story of how she had her first girlfriend and needed to hide it from her family. They eventually got caught by a family member and it was a big deal. "They set up one of those Christian tent meetings, I sat in the middle, and everyone was standing around me praying and slapping my forehead" … asking me, 'do you feel

the holy spirits?' I wanted to fuck around a bit and start moving to mess with them." *Bush Rock Woman* acknowledged that although she was able to laugh about the situation now, it was very traumatic for her at the time.

In addition to *Bush Rock Woman*'s experiences with church and Christianity, she also spoke about how difficult it was to be placed with families with diverse cultural backgrounds. She stated, "honestly, all those homes made me feel bad about who I was, fat, ugly, gay, Indigenous…it made me hate who I was because I did not belong or look or act a certain way". Some of the placements she mentioned were with people who had unfamiliar cultural backgrounds such as Vietnamese and Buddhist… "they lacked Indigenous anything…any knowledge around anything Indigenous…and worst yet, they believed all the stereotypes about welfare people, poor people, drugs and alcohol, and Indigenous people".

Robyn

Although Robyn lived in several different placements as a young child and as a late teen, she spent most of her childhood with her foster family. As mentioned in her vignette, Robyn, and her siblings (both biological and foster) lived in a very structured home and participated daily in religious practices. Robyn and her siblings were required to complete daily, 1-hour long devotions every morning. They would begin their day by reviewing a Bible verse or psalms and would memorize the entire chapter. Robyn commented that "the way her foster mother went about this was almost like a sergeant and I was actually scared of her…when people force you to do things, it defeats the purpose". Robyn commented that "we were to live a godly life", and she understood that anything to do with Indigenous culture was not supported by her foster mother. While Robyn still identifies as Christian as an adult, she does not attend church; however, these experiences still formed a foundation for her, and she continues to carry many of

the values she was taught. When her foster home placement eventually broke down, Robyn was moved to residential group homes to live with other youth her age. "When I was in group care, I was confused…I thought, if this is God's will, why is my life falling apart? How others in the [religious] community treated us did not align with the values they taught." Robyn began to explore her Indigenous identity in her late teens, but admits her motivation was that she was "angry with God, religion, and the church…I started going to pow wows and sweats because I was mad…I was a very angry person". Robyn stated that she "started doing all the things my foster mom wouldn't let us…some things I did to be oppositional (to foster mom) and some to get approval from group home staff".

Luciann

Luciann did not speak at length about the impact religion had on her identity development, but she did share a story about something that had happened in her early teenage years related to this topic. Luciann had been living with her mother at the time, and her mother told her they were going to visit some friends on the reserve (Enoch). Luciann was happy to tag along, and they had even stopped to buy some snacks and cigarettes for the trip at their community gas station. Luciann's mother had then brought her to the community center and stated they were going to go in and visit her friend. When Luciann entered the building, the doors were quickly shut and locked behind her. Luciann was locked in the lobby area with members of the local church. "I began to flip out…they wouldn't let me leave and told me I was being forced to participate in a religious youth retreat…I was screaming…throwing chairs…and telling them that they would not indoctrinate me". Luciann had heard her mother's experiences in the Indian Residential Schools and did not want anything to do with religion or the church. Luciann laughed as she told the story, noting that once she had calmed down, she

realized that all the other youth were sitting in the next room to her and heard everything. "I did

my time [by attending the youth retreat] …but I was raised with the Sun Dance lodges…that is

how I was raised…not with the church.

Splitting up with Siblings

When discussing their experiences with the child welfare system, both *Bush Rock Woman*

and Robyn both spoke about how devastating it was when they were separated from their

siblings. After their apprehension, because there were 4-5 siblings in each of their families, the

siblings were split up and spread out across the city. Many placements available in our existing

child welfare system can only take one or two children at a time and therefore, siblings are often

separated.

Bush Rock Woman stated that "we were all split up, which was crazy sad…for years we

were all bounced around from placement to placement because no one wants to take a sibling

group of four kids". Before the children were apprehended, because there were addictions and

violence in the home, *Bush Rock Woman* "was a mom to [her] siblings…and would often take

[her] brothers and sisters and lock them in a closet until it was over when her parents were

drinking". In addition to being separated from their siblings, the children were required to

switch placements often, due to frequent placement breakdowns, trauma-based behaviors, lack of

available resources, and so on. Thus, the children were equally often switching schools, leaving

friends, and abandoning sports teams and other recreational activities; according to *Bush Rock*

Woman, "I never got too comfortable in one place, because I assumed it wouldn't last

long". This is something that *she* indicated still impacts her as an adult: she never gets too

comfortable, because she believes things never last.

Robyn also spoke about how her siblings were split up during their initial apprehension and again when her foster home broke down when she was a teenager. Although Robyn admits the overall living conditions had improved after her apprehension, she stated: "I remember feeling alone…not knowing where anyone went…for a while, I kind of forgot I had siblings". Eventually, her two older siblings were placed with foster parents who were adamant about keeping the whole family together. "They advocated to social workers to keep us together…they said the reserve was bad and they didn't want us to live there…so we all moved back together, I was still feeling depressed, but we all got to live together". All the children grew close together throughout their childhood, especially because they were homeschooled and often their only interaction was with each other. After the family moved around a bit, they ended up living in Sherwood Park. Robyn stated that some of her siblings had some mental health issues; her brother was sent to a group home first, then her other brother for similar reasons. Eventually, the placement broke down and all her siblings were sent to live in group homes across Edmonton. Robyn remembers feeling angry: "They didn't even fight for us. Soon after we [the foster siblings] were moved, the entire family went to Florida without us…we were the dead weight".

Indian Residential Schools

It is important to note that during my data collection, there were several significant events occurring at the provincial and national levels regarding Indigenous peoples. For many of the participants, the interviews occurred during the peak summer months of Indian Residential Schools properties being searched for unmarked graves of former Indigenous students. While there was shock and public outrage across Canada about the unmarked gravesites, the 'discovery' was not surprising to survivors of the Indian Residential School system, Elders, or

their family members (Kieser, 2023). Stories of children not returning from the Indian Residential Schools have been spoken about for decades in Indigenous communities. As a young adult, when I attended some of my first ceremonies at Poundmaker's Healing Lodge (a former residential school turned into an addiction treatment facility), there was often discussion of the children who had been buried in the surrounding fields of the school.

As a researcher and as noted by the participants, this was a very emotional time for all of us: we are all the children and/or grandchildren of Indian Residential School survivors. The constant media coverage, coupled with the establishment of September 30th as a national holiday, often made its way into our conversations during our interviews. The participants each shared stories of their family members' experiences, the intergenerational impacts of Residential Schools, and their own experiences that shaped their identities as Indigenous women.

Bush Rock Woman spoke about her family's experiences with Indian Residential Schools. Learning about the impacts of IRS (Indian Residential Schools) helped her better understand intergenerational trauma. *Bush Rock Woman* stated throughout both interviews that she experienced abuse from her family members. It was not until she understood what happened to her family members that she was able to understand why she experienced what she did. She noted that learning this earlier would have helped: "If I would have known our history earlier, it would have changed a lot…When I was in university and learned the history, it helped me make sense of my grandmother and my mom".

As an adult, Robyn was able to stay connected with her mother who was living in Toronto. Robyn and her older sister were contacted by her mother's lawyer and were asked to attend the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's survivors conference in Toronto. Robyn's mother was a survivor of the Indian Residential Schools and was to provide a testimony

for the TRC. Robyn agreed to go if her older sister would attend with her. When they met their mother in Toronto, Robyn stated that "when I first arrived, I was angry with my mother, for the past and in the moment because she was intoxicated." Robyn was upset but decided to listen to the testimony anyway. In hearing her mother's story, Robyn stated, "it changed things for me…it clarified why she wasn't there for us". During our conversation I asked Robyn if she would like to share a good memory of her mother and Robyn stated that "it was that testimony and the courage it took to share her story…it is because I heard my mother's story that I am now sharing mine", both in this study and with the youth Robyn is working with.

Semi Independent Living (SIL)

When a child is taken into government care, they are typically placed in kinship care, a foster home, or a residential group home. When the participants were living in this care system, the policy at the time indicated that they would be transferred out of care at the age of 18. Since then, the legislation was amended in 2021to allow young people in government care to receive support until the age of 24. Under the United Conservative Party government in Alberta, through changes to legislation the cut-off age was shifted back to age 22 in 2021. To support young people transitioning to adulthood out of the care system, part of the transition plan for many youths in care is to be transferred into Transitional Semi-Independent Living (TSIL) and then Semi-Independent Living (SIL) group homes before eventually striking out on their own. Regardless of whether a given young person is ready to be transitioned into this type of placement or not or not, government funding and support is to expire when they reach a certain age therefore, many youths are moved into an environment where there is a strong emphasis on independence and limited support from Child and Youth Care workers.

For both *Bush Rock Woman* and Robyn, their time in this transitional process to independent living was challenging. *Bush Rock Woman* stated that she lived during this time with many of her siblings in a residential group home that was close to her reserve. The residential group home kept her for as long as possible, but she was eventually moved back to the city alone to live in a supported independent living environment because she was aging out of care. This was the time that *Bush Rock Woman* identified as "when everything started to go downhill," and she started to get into trouble: "I stopped going to school, I started using drugs and alcohol, and hanging with the wrong crowd". Moving back into the city, having more freedom, and being placed with other youth in the same situation really impacted *Bush Rock Woman*'s behavior. Robyn provided a similar narrative to her experiences transitioning into TSIL and SIL programs when she was aging out of care. During that time, her alcohol and drug use was at its worst, and her support workers were concerned for her well-being as they could see the progression of incidents and more frequent hospitalizations. Robyn shared that this occurred after she was completely disconnected from her foster family and had also fallen into the "wrong crowd". She shared that "[she] was doing all the things [she] swore [she] would never do". Both participants reflect on their time in these programs as having an overall negative impact on their behaviour, substance use, and relationships.

Interaction with Others

Relationships with Biological Mother

Bush Rock Woman spoke about her biological mother throughout the interview, mostly when speaking about her pre-apprehension experiences and while sharing about her mother's tragic passing when she was a teenager. *Bush Rock Woman* lived with her biological mother in

the early years of her life but remained in contact with her mother while later residing in kinship, foster, and group homes. *Bush Rock Woman* admitted that her mother was dealing with addictions, which resulted in difficulty finding and securing stable housing. *Bush Rock Woman* shared, "we moved around a lot, sometimes living in motels", an experience that *Bush Rock Woman* found humiliating. *Bush Rock Woman* felt as though she needed to take on the role of a mom for her younger siblings to keep them safe. "Through house parties, I would lock us in a room or hide…it was an ugly, vicious cycle…and then there is the trauma of knowing that our parents were drinking and how it was going to end in an ugly, vicious cycle". Once the children were apprehended, their mother attempted to regain custody, but all the children would become subject to PGO status.

    Bush Rock Woman shared a significant story about how she was playing in a basketball game at school, and she suddenly noticed that a bunch of her family members had showed up to watch her play. After the game, they took her home, and she noticed many cars outside of her Kokum's house. Her entire family was there, and they explained to *Bush Rock Woman* and her siblings that their mother had passed away. This was a devastating experience for *Bush Rock Woman*, and she became very emotional speaking about this in the interviews. "Even though we had a complicated relationship, I cared about her and remember how she use to sing to me and my siblings". After her mother passed away, *Bush Rock Woman* stated that she felt "crushed, hurt, was in shock, and angry that we would never be able to live together again as they planned". When asked if her mother's passing impacted her future behaviours and hanging with the wrong crowd and abusing substances, she said, "absolutely, shit spiralled after that". *Bush Rock Woman* shared that the last conversation she had with her mother was not great, and she regretted it; "I had cussed her out…I was mad that she chose her boyfriend over us…I realize

now that I had lost her long before this". What *Bush Rock Woman* found especially difficult is that she "always thought [my mother] would come back…she would always tell me to take care of [my siblings] till we are back together".

Robyn

Of all the participants, Robyn spoke about her biological parents the most. Robyn has undertaken significant processing and reflection on her relationship with her parents and has maintained consistent contact with her biological father throughout her life. Robyn stated that she understands now that her family of origin's living environment was prior to apprehension. "There were drugs and alcohol…neglect…hints of sexual and physical abuse". Even though Robyn was young when she and her siblings were initially apprehended, she has clear memories of feeling confused: "I remember the police banging on the door and my siblings and I trying to hide…my dad had got involved in an attempted murder…this [experience] still impacts me to this day." She noted that though their living conditions drastically improved when they were moved into a temporary placement, she always felt confused and alone. She maintained contact with her parents, and in the initial stages of her separation from them, would often have scheduled visits and phone calls with her mom and dad. "We would get a lot of phone calls from prison, [as] my mom was also in and out of prison…we would have visits with my mom, and I would get excited although sometimes she did not show up. I just remember feeling confused and sad all the time". Robyn stated that "nobody really ever explained to us what was going on…I was always wondering where everyone went". With the confusion of apprehension and separation from her siblings, Robyn said she would often find herself looking for her mother in crowds. "We used to go swimming every day and would go to a local pool…as a kid, I would always be looking around the pool and if I saw a native person I would think, is that my mother?

I was always looking for them everywhere I went". She admits she was young, but she never understood what was going on.

When the children all ended up with the same foster family, the one they would live with for about 10 years, Robyn remained in contact with her parents. The foster parents would schedule visits for Robyn and her siblings to visit their father in the Drumheller prison, and he would often send Robyn gifts that he made for her while serving his sentence. Robyn also shared how her early experiences impacted how she interacted with and understood native people in general. "We didn't see a lot of native people [in Grand Cache] … I remember one time we went to St. Paul to bring our chickens into the slaughterhouse, and on the way back, we stopped at KFC for lunch…there were some native people, and I was scared of them, I was terrified…seeing them and the drinking brought back a lot of fear for me."

As an adult, Robyn rebuilt a relationship with her father to some extent and would have some regular phone calls with her mother, who was living in Toronto, every few weeks. "She called me one day and said that she was going to die soon…this made me angry, like why would you call your 18-year-old kid and say this? A few weeks went by, and I didn't hear from her… my sister and I got a call from my mom's sister telling us our mom had collapsed in the street in Toronto…she had been in the morgue for two weeks before she was even identified". Robyn stated that this was an important event in her life. Robyn and her sister attended the funeral in Regina to say goodbye to their mother, and Robyn shared that "this is what saved me…I found purpose; I wanted something more for myself;" it was her mother's passing that motivated Robyn to turn things around.

Luciann

Throughout the interviews, Luciann often spoke about her relationships with her mother and her mother's boyfriend throughout her childhood. Luciann lived with her biological mother sporadically growing up. She also spent time living with her aunt, who she adored, and her grandparents for a period, and then would often end up back with her mother. When speaking about her relationship with her biological mother, Luciann stated that things really boiled over in their relationship when she entered adolescence. "Nothing I did was ever right…I was so expressive and would just blow up". She remembers her sister asking her why she just couldn't have a good relationship with their mother, and Luciann did not know why. It was in the ninth grade that Luciann and her mother decided together to place Luciann into a group home setting; thus, Luciann's placement within the child welfare system was a mutual agreement between herself and her mother.

In reflecting on her relationships with her mother, Luciann also spoke at length about her mother's boyfriend, who was present during a significant period of Luciann's childhood and adolescence. Luciann shared that she was a victim of sexual abuse, beginning at age six or seven, at the hands of her mother's boyfriend. This is something that she began to see a therapist about at an early age. Although the abuse occurred over a lengthy period, Luciann reported that those around her acted like nothing was happening. Luciann shared a story about a time, years after the beginning of the sexual abuse when she was no longer living with her mother, when she excitedly ran into her sister on a bus one day. Luciann went with her sister back to her sister's home, where she discovered that her sister was living with her mother's now ex-boyfriend, the same man who had abused her when she was younger. Luciann and her sister would reconnect over time, and one evening Luciann was babysitting her sister's children. While babysitting, Luciann was sexually assaulted again by her mother's ex-boyfriend. A few days after, Luciann

had a scheduled appointment with her therapist, and she mentioned what had occurred. Her therapist brought Luciann to a police station, where she was interviewed about what had happened, an experience she indicated was very traumatic. The mother's ex-boyfriend was charged, and after the preliminary hearing, Luciann ran to the high-level bridge with the intention of jumping off. She was placed on suicide watch; she also shared that there was another incident following this where she attempted suicide after getting really drunk with her friends. After years of healing, Luciann spoke to the complexities of sexual abuse. "I need to see the positives too- he [mother's ex-boyfriend] was my dad…he taught me how to clean a fish, and I have a brother and a sister from him".

Role Models

Bush Rock Woman met Terri in mid-adolescence, as Terri agreed to provide kinship care to her brother and, later, all the siblings. During our interviews, we often spoke about love, specifically about Indigenous love. When *Bush Rock Woman* went to live with Terri, she shared that Terri would frequently participate in ceremony (such as smudging the house, attending sweats, and fasting), and she remembered watching her from a distance: "Terri never pushed the cultural stuff on me; if she had, I would have probably rejected it". *Bush Rock Woman* was able to approach cultural ceremonies on her own terms and spent time just watching Terri smudging the house and going to ceremonies whenever she could. "I finally asked to go to a sweat with her…in the sweat, it was a life-changing moment for me…I was ugly crying…it was amazing". *Bush Rock Woman* stated that her experience of ceremony was a significant turning point for her that allowed her to explore and understand love and self-love. It was through connections with Terri and her husband that she was able to feel connection, acceptance, and unconditional love. *Bush Rock Woman* made a significant statement about the impact of her

relationship with Terri; "when you are shown love, you grow differently…you see someone who lacks it, and they grow differently". Her relationship with Terri shaped how she understood herself, conceptualized her Indigenous identity, and reconnected with her culture.

Another way this relationship was significant is that Terri introduced *Bush Rock Woman* to her (Terri's) brother, who identified as two-spirited. "Being two-spirited was always hush-hush; my family was Christian…I was scared, I saw how my family and other kids treated LGBTQ2+ individuals". As previously mentioned, *Bush Rock Woman* struggled with her sexual orientation, and when it was discovered that she had a girlfriend, her family attempted to "pray the gay away." When *Bush Rock Woman* was introduced to Terri's brother and observed how he lived his life, she could see how freeing it was. "Now that I am older and I feel a sincere love, they care for me, and I could feel it…seeing Terri's brother being so comfortable in his own skin, him talking about coming out and how free he feels really influenced me as well". *Bush Rock Woman* was comfortable in this relationship, and she felt confident that Terri would always love her the way she was. This was significant for both *Bush Rock Woman* and my own experiences as a researcher, as there are many similarities between our stories. While discussing Indigenous identity as well as being a member of the LGBTQ2+ community, there were times when we both cried together. Love and acceptance from the Indigenous community impacted our identity development as LGBTQ2+ people.

Robyn

In Robyn's childhood, living with the foster family for about ten years, her connection to community was limited. "We didn't really have a lot of social interaction, we had a rigid routine…every morning, we would have our hour-long devotions, chores, swimming, and

schoolwork". All the children in the foster home were home-schooled and it was not until

Robyn was in her middle to late adolescence that she began attending a public school. "While I

was in a SIL placement, I started going to school" (as this is a requirement of living in the

placement) and "I really wanted to graduate". Robyn began attending an outreach school to

finish up her remaining credits for her high school diploma. "It was a really great school for me,

I would go to class often hung over, and they would never send me home". One relationship that

Robyn spoke about being influential in her life was a teacher who strongly encouraged her to

write. When Robyn's mom passed away, this teacher was kind and compassionate and safety

planned with her to make sure she did not try and harm herself or let her grief derail the progress

she had made. Robyn successfully graduated, and fondly remembered the support and kindness

she was offered by this teacher during such a tough time. When discussing this teacher, Robyn

stated that "they made me feel empowered".

Robyn also spoke at length about her relationships with Child and Youth Care

practitioners. When Robyn was transferred into the transitional living programs, she did not

cause many problems within the placement despite actively using drugs and alcohol. Robyn

stated she "loved the rec activities, was always willing to participate and was really easy to work

with". She developed strong relationships with many of the workers; she felt as though they

cared for her and were patient with her. "At one point, the workers gave me an ultimatum; they

were worried about the drugs and increase in hospitalizations…they were disappointed, and I

ended up going to an AADAC program". The support from the Child and Youth Care workers

really helped Robyn find her way back to a good path.

What is notable about the teacher and child and youth care workers Robyn fondly spoke

about is that she still has some of those connections as an adult. Robyn was able to find adult

figures that genuinely cared about her, and it made an enormous difference; she explained that she "thrived for connection", and "still [has]those connections to this day".

Luciann

Throughout the interviews, Luciann shared several stories about her time spent living with her grandmother and grandfather. In her younger years, she lived with her grandparents just outside the reserve. As will be further discussed in the following section, Luciann's understanding of her Indigenous identity and her deep connection to her culture stems from her time spent with these grandparents. Luciann shared that she and her grandfather would get up early in the mornings before the sun, and they would just sit together. Her grandfather was a quiet man, and she really valued the peaceful time they spent together. When speaking to these relationships, Luciann identified how they impact her as a practitioner today, "these youth think that Indigenous identity is pow wows and round dances, but it is so much deeper than that…it is kinship…it is food…it is waking up every morning and being in ceremony".

Understanding of Self

Defining Indigenous identity

Rock Bush Woman began by explaining that she is still in the process of learning what her Indigenous identity means to her. When asked about her understanding of identity, *Bush Rock Woman* consistently referred to experiencing Indigenous love and self-love. When sharing her story and her perspectives on identity development, her story was told very much in two parts: before and after her experience of unconditional love. Considering her the constant moving around, strained relationship with her mother, unstable placements, and ongoing abuse, *Bush Rock Woman* was clear that everything changed for her once there was a caring adult in her life. The years of abuse and relational challenges had distorted how she understood connection

with others, often mistaking it for lust. She now understands love as a feeling of welcoming, belonging, and unconditional acceptance. She felt it from Terri and Jack, and within ceremony, which allowed her to further explore and understand self-love. It was through a role model who demonstrated strength, resilience, generosity, and love that she understood *Bush Rock Woman* own identity as an Indigenous woman. Indigenous identity for *Bush Rock Woman* relates to connection, "accepting and being accepted", and unconditional.

Robyn stated that she "identifies as First Nations, but I don't follow through (referring to the cultural aspects)." Robyn explained that growing up her foster mother found Indigenous culture to be "fake, evil, and B.S." This message was given to all the children in the foster home. Robyn stated that this messaging really stuck with her and "it is really hard to get away from that when that is what you are taught for so long." Robyn's foster mother outright spoke against anything that had to do with the Indigenous culture and showed her disapproval in more indirect ways. Robyn shared a story about how her biological father, a well-known Indigenous artist, would send her gifts while he was incarcerated. He would send gifts such as jewellery boxes he made, or paintings he created. The foster mother did not approve of this and was adamant that the children be raised in a Christian household. Robyn comes from a large family and acknowledges that some of her siblings and cousins are far more connected to the culture than she is. "There is a shame in not knowing where you come from, I have a desire to be like my cousins…there is no connection to family…you can see who is connected and who is not…I always feel like I am trying to catch up to everyone."

As a Child and Youth Care Practitioner actively working in the field, Robyn also reflected on her Indigenous identity within that role. She stated, "there is always this assumption that I am cultural and there is an expectation and pressure to be a cultural support in the workplace." For

many years, Robyn would be expected to facilitate cultural activities with the youth she worked

with because she was Indigenous. This created some feelings of discomfort for Robyn as she felt

that she was not being genuine. She was not passionate about it and felt that there was a

disconnect with youth and with her own identity.

Luciann stated when she speaking to youth in the Child and Youth Care field, that they

understand Indigenous identity and culture to be ceremony, Pow Wows, and round dances…but

she understood it to be much deeper than that. She acknowledges that the rounds dances and

community aspect is part of it, but there is so much more to it than that. Luciann understands

Indigenous identity to be "a belief that everything is connected…that everything has a spirit, and

therefore you need to respect everything." Luciann shared a story of when she was living with

her grandparents when she was younger and how they were her a foundation to an Indigenous

worldview. "I just remember being a little kid playing on the farm, and my grandmother would

be yelling at me to not chase the chickens! They know! she would say." As an adult, she can

now see that you need to respect everything around you…respect the bugs, the trees,

everyone…including those who hurt you." Indigenous identity, for Luciann is "grounded in

traditional Indigenous kinship…we are all connected, whoever you treat are family…it is our

food and the sharing of food…it's forgiveness." The way she sees the world, Indigenous culture,

and identity…" it's not written anywhere, it is shown to you." Luciann stated that her biggest

lesson she received about her Indigenous identity is you "live your life as a ceremony from the

moment you wake up till the moment you go to sleep."

Activity

Through the interviews with participants, activity/sport influenced their identity

development throughout their childhood and adolescence. While Robyn placed more emphasis

on the importance of sport for her identity, both *Bush Rock Woman* and Luciann referenced activity and/or sport playing a significant part of their lives when they were growing up in the child welfare system.

Robyn and her siblings had lived a very structured life while living in the foster home. As previously mentioned, they had a very structured routine and one activity that was part of that routine was swimming. "We would swim every day and it was our big outing because we were homeschooled." Swimming and sport became something that Robyn looked forward to and connect with her foster father about. "We did swimming lessons and swam competitively…it was an outlet…it let me build a different identity…I felt belonging…it gave me purpose…it was an outlet." Robyn further added that she really "cared about swimming" and it "gave her purpose." Similarly, *Bush Rock Woman* spoke about how much she loved playing on the school team sports and for her as well it was an outlet. *Bush Rock Woman* stated, "I played on the basketball team, volleyball team, badminton…school and sports became my safe place." It was through sport that *Bush Rock Woman* would eventually meet Jack. who was the schools Cree teacher, sports coach, and married to Terri (who was previously mentioned). With *Bush Rock Woman*'s living situation being unstable and often hostile, *Bush Rock Woman* would join whatever team she could. Jack would become more prominent in *Bush Rock Woman* and her siblings lives as he would drive them home after practice and would pack them lunches and Gatorades when he saw that they were coming to school without.

With Luciann, she did not necessarily play sports like Robyn and *Bush Rock Woman*; however, she spoke at length of the importance 'sober clubs' were when she was an adolescent. She even went as far as saying that "if I had a million dollars, I would make sober clubs all over the country for youth." Sober clubs, as she explained, were places that sober youth would meet

and were open from 9 pm to 3 am. "Sober clubs are where I would go dancing with my friends, it kept me out of trouble…nobody bothered me, and we were safe.". Although the activities are different amongst the participants, each of them stated how important it was for them to have these spaces and activities in coping with what was going on in their personal lives. They found connection, they found belonging, safety, and for some they found purpose.

Connection, Re-connection, Disconnection

When reflecting on their relationship to Indigenous culture as adults, the three participants all shared quite different responses. Their involvement with Indigenous ceremonies and spirituality all presented itself in varying degrees that could be described as connection, re-connection and disconnected.

Luciann shared many stories throughout our interviews and time together that pointed to a keen sense of self and understanding of her Indigenous identity from an early age. When sharing stories about living with her aunt and grandparents when she was a young child, Luciann shared that they really built the foundation for her in understanding who she was. Luciann discussed and has faced many challenges in her life and would often emphasize how she would use Indigenous spirituality and Indigenous culture as part of her healing. Luciann was passionate about supporting Indigenous youth, traditional kinship, and 'living in ceremony from the moment you wake up." An example she provided when discussing her own healing and traditional practices is how she dealt with the grief and loss of losing three of her children to miscarriages. Luciann read several books from the university library on how to process loss, but she stated that "the Indigenous culture really helped' her. She was able to heal from the trauma of losing three babies through miscarriage through ceremony, singing songs to the four directions, and asked for them to be given an Indian name. Luciann has now dedicated her life to

supporting Indigenous children, youth, and families across Canada in various capacities. She shared a story about a young man in a residential group home she was working with, and he was initially noticeably quiet. When they got to talking the young man asked if he could rap for her and Luciann said, "it was amazing…it was the saddest song and broke my heart…there were hints of sexual abuse." When the youth was finished Luciann told the young man "This mother will always love you and pray for you." In all the positions that she has worked in, she brings with her the cultural teachings and supports Indigenous youth to explore and understand who they are and where they come from.

Bush Rock Woman clearly articulated her moment of reconnecting to her Indigenous culture and when she started to explore her identity as a Cree woman. When Bush Rock Woman was going through the multiple placements within the child welfare system, she stated that they "all made her feel horrible about who she was, they made her hate herself and feel like she didn't belong." She explained that the first sweat she went to she remembers that the second they closed the door she began to cry and that she was completely overwhelmed with feelings of belonging and love. The emotional experience she described was so like what I had experienced in my young adulthood (see chapter 1) when I heard the drum for the first time. This was a huge turning point for Bush Rock Woman and opened the doors for her to explore who she really was as an Indigenous woman. In the following years, Bush Rock Woman participated in a Sundance, fasting, more sweats, sitting and listening from community elders, and was even part of a traditional ceremony to be adopted into Terri and Jack's family. Bush Rock Woman spoke of her Indigenous identity with immense pride throughout all the interviews and at times would become emotional about her reconnection to her culture, ceremonies, and traditions.

In sharing her experiences and her story within the Child Welfare system, Robyn touched on her feelings surrounding her Indigenous identity and development on several occasions. She stated, "while I identify as First Nations, I do not follow through…my dad is cultural…but for me it is not genuine." Robyn explained that as a Child and Youth Care practitioner she is often asked to be the cultural role in her place of work, she reflected "that there is an expectation/pressure just because you are brown…I eventually had to tell them I was not going to do the cultural activities anymore…it was uncomfortable for me". When *Bush Rock Woman* was in TSIL (Transitional Semi-Independent Living) and SIL (Semi Independent Living) after her foster home placement broke down, she explained that she did start going to pow-wows, art shows and sweats. "It was because I was mad at my foster mom, I was going to do all the things she said I couldn't…it was out of anger." In a later interview she also stated that in the group homes she was forced to participate in cultural activities, "it wasn't real…I was doing it for other people, out of obligation…this is a pattern [for me] …I always wanted to please others. While she acknowledges that there is a disconnection to her Indigenous identity, she did state that she "has a desire to be like her cousins" and that she always feels like she is trying to catch up.

Indigenous Identity Supported and not supported in their Child Welfare experiences

The final two questions from my interviews asked the participants to reflect on ways they felt their identity was not supported and supported in their placements while in care. While writing this section of the data presentation, it reflects not only the participant responses they gave when asked this specific question but also how they answered the question throughout all interviews.

Not Supported

In my initial phone interview with *Bush Rock Woman*, in explaining my research her immediate response was that "residential group homes are an extension of the Indian Residential Schools." From our very first conversation she started expressing her concerns with how the Child Welfare system did not support her Indigenous identity. When sharing her story, she often commented on how many of the placements she had were non-Indigenous placements. Oftentimes, she found the foster parents or group home staff to be "prejudice and ignorant…and there was a lack of knowledge and understanding of Indigenous anything." As previously mentioned, *Bush Rock Woman* stated that the non-Indigenous placements were problematic for her because her and her siblings would need to adapt to whatever culture or religion the placement followed. The placement held prejudice towards Indigenous people, some forced children to adhere to a religious denomination, and she constantly felt like she did not belong. An important story that *Bush Rock Woman* spoke about is how when there was effort to connect the youth to their Indigenous culture in a way that was not helpful. Each year they would get all the Indigenous children and youth who were in the child welfare system, load them on a bus, and take them out to the reserve to attend a pow wow. With little to no exposure to Indigenous culture and events, she felt completely out of place. "I didn't know what was going on, I didn't understand the significance…we didn't know anyone there, we didn't even know what was going on." *Bush Rock Woman* acknowledges that the effort was there but even when you went once a year you did not really learn about who you are. Being from the city, "we stuck out like a sore thumb…when you don't know who you are these experiences can be difficult to process."

Robyn

When Robyn was reflecting on ways that her identity was not supported, she spoke a lot about forced participation. Initially we had spoken about living in a household such as her foster

home where she had no choice but to participate in daily devotions, memorizing psalms and practice Christianity. Although she identifies as a Christian, she commented on how being forced to do something really had the opposite effect that was intended. "I never got to choose Christianity, I just did it because I had to…when you are forced to do something it loses its authenticity." Robyn applied her same beliefs about forced participation to cultural activities when she was living in a residential group home. "It wasn't real…I was doing it for other people…out of obligation." It was noted that *Bush Rock Woman* also spoke very strongly about forced participation and how she would automatically reject anything that was being forced upon her.

Another area that was not supported for Robyn was the negative messaging she was receiving about Indigenous people and culture throughout her childhood. Indigenous culture was seen as "fake and evil," and Robyn admitted that "it was really difficult to unlearn that" as an adult.

Supported

Bush Rock Woman was the only participant to share a story about how a placement supported her Indigenous identity development while in care. When *Bush Rock Woman* and her siblings were apprehended from their kinship placement because *Bush Rock Woman* had reported to the police that her sister had received a black eye from a family member hitting her, they were moved to a group home that was just outside of their community. This placement was different from all her placements up to that point. "The group home was close to the reserve, and they did have some Indigenous workers there believe it or not." Because they were located close to the reserve *Bush Rock Woman* stated that they had access to more cultural resources and supports.

She shared that while living in this placement they were able to make little drum sets…they had a cultural person come in and do activities with us." Coincidentally one of the cultural people working at the group home was the mother of Terri. A fond memory that she shared about this placement is that her and her siblings were able to be together, they had elders in, and they would sing. *Bush Rock Woman* stated that this was the only placement that she had that all these cultural supports and activities.

Changes

Bush Rock Woman provided several recommendations of how our current welfare system for our Indigenous youth in care. Based on her experiences, *Bush Rock Woman* believes that early education could drastically improve the lives of Indigenous youth, could improve the youth and caregiver relationship, and how social workers approach the case files they are assigned to. As a youth, she believes that if she would have been educated on the history earlier that it would have changed how she understood some of the relationships she had in her life. "When I was in university and I learned the history, it helped make sense of my grandmother and my mom." It would have helped her process the reasons why they acted the way they did. She continues to say that there should be mandatory courses for awareness for workers and placement caregivers. As previously mentioned, many of the caregivers held prejudice towards Indigenous peoples, "words stick with you and some of the things they would say to us really encouraged us to self-hate."

Another recommendation *Bush Rock Woman* had was that there be more opportunities for Indigenous youth to explore their Indigenous identity than simply attending a pow wow once a year. Specifically, she stated that ceremonies be incorporated into the children's lives from an

early age. "Introducing culture would save lives…so many people I know would still be alive if they would have had the ceremonies…ceremonies are suicide prevention." Her concluding thoughts were to include ceremonies with family members, as an example would be having a sweat with her mom and dad while she was still alive. "This would be so powerful for future generations…to be in ceremony with their parents."
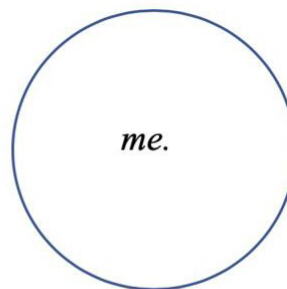
When Robyn was reflecting on her recommendations she was in a unique position. She was a survivor of the child welfare system, and she was currently working in the child and youth care field with Indigenous youth. From a personal level, she explained that she felt as though she "had no connection to family and there was shame in not knowing where you come from." She wishes that she were taught at a younger age, and that she was "more connected with her biological family." When Robyn was speaking from a Child and Youth Care practitioner's point of view, she acknowledged that there are a lot of negative perspectives in place of work. "We need to spend more time with their story, their family…we need to work on respecting each other's cultures or even have more experiences with other cultures." She noticed that many of the youth she works with are parroting what they have been taught…they have negative views on the world, and I want to change that."

When Luciann spoke about changes to the existing Child Welfare system, she was speaking about the work she is currently doing in Winnipeg. Luciann has been working for several years with Indigenous youth in care and with her various positions she has worked in Edmonton, Calgary, and is now a caseworker with Child and Family Services in Winnipeg. Her responses were framed by identifying what she is doing to improve the services provided. As an Indigenous caseworker, Luciann stated that she has been questioning the existing policies and procedures on how the placements are including culture into their programming. Luciann noted

that "even though Alberta needs a lot of work, Winnipeg is still years behind in terms of incorporating Indigenous culture into their practice." Luciann is a big supporter of education, and she encourages the youth she interacts with to find their gifts and go to school for it. With completing several years of post-secondary education, Luciann has used both culture and education for healing.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis

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Kelsey Reed…
    Bill C-31 6-2 Status Indian
                       Queer
                      Female
                    Bi-Racial
                  Off-Reserve
                        Urban
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me.

Reflections on my Role as a Researcher

Where I am coming from

As I began the data analysis, it is important that I position myself and experiences with the research topic as it undoubtedly contributes to the lens in which I find meaning in the participants responses. I began working as a Child and Youth Care practitioner in my first year of university as a practicum student in a residential group home for Indigenous youth, aged 12-17, and were labelled as 'high risk'. I was seventeen at the time and still in the initial stages of figuring out my own identity as an Indigenous person. I completed my undergraduate degree with the department of Child and Youth Care and began working with Indigenous peoples in various capacities. Over my ten years as a Child and Youth Care practitioner, I worked in residential group homes for high-risk youth and young mothers, housing for our local Indigenous homeless population, shelters for our homeless youth, and an instructor for a job preparation program for young adults. My eyes were quickly opened to the many challenges our people were facing in terms of social injustice, racism, inequality, overincarceration, and suicide. My anger

towards our society was deep but it was countered with a deeper love for my people. When I became immersed into the field and hearing stories from our Indigenous youth, I began to question the entire Child Welfare system. I started to question policy and procedures, the limitations we had to support youth as practitioners, and critically reflecting on how we were providing services. When I brought my concerns forward to a co-worker they simply replied, "if you don't like the policies, go back to school and change them." It was then I decided to continue with my education and would dedicate my graduate studies to understanding the history, current realities, and experiences of our Indigenous children, youth, and families that are involved with the Child Welfare system. I found my way to this study because I love the Indigenous people I have worked with, and I want to improve the services we are providing them.

Alongside education, I have also been in the process of reconnecting with my culture and my Indigenous identity. As mentioned in the first chapter of my dissertation, identity is something that I struggled with growing up and it was not until my early adulthood that I was able to begin my journey of self-discovery as an Indigenous person. I struggled for many years with addiction and well-being, and I can clearly see now that the Indigenous culture and Indigenous community saved my life. Because I was so young when I entered the field as a Child and Youth Care practitioner, I found that I could relate to the youth I was working with. We were both Indigenous, felt a disconnection from our Indigenous identity, and were struggling with addiction. We were close to the same age, and I could connect with them when they spoke about a longing for connection to their Indigenous identity, communities, and culture. I came to this research topic for the youth I worked with and from my own experiences as an Indigenous person.

Acknowledging my own bias and assumptions

Reflecting on the process of collecting data through the interviews with participants, there were some assumptions I had that were incorrect. The first assumption was that I would be asking the participants to really explore their experiences in residential group homes. I had stated in my proposal that I would not be looking at kinship or foster placements and just residential group homes. What I had not considered is that when we are approaching research from an Indigenous worldview, experiences cannot be fragmented and understood in isolation. I quickly realized that I need to see and understand the entire story of the participant to make meaning.

My second assumption that was challenged was my belief that I would be able to set aside my own traumatic experiences with identity development when hearing the participants story. In fact, this was even questioned in a way during my oral candidacy examination with my committee. In keeping a reflexive journal, I was able to document my emotional responses to certain stories and experiences that revealed parts of my own story that I have not completely healed from. As a researcher, I had a tough time processing the participants stories that involved religion, specifically the Catholic church. Each participant told a significant story about a negative experience they had with religion, or religious organization. In hearing their stories, I had an emotional reaction to them. In some of the interviews I cried with the participants and in others I found myself thinking about it for days afterwards. In reflecting on this, my emotional response (for the most part internal response) extended far beyond what would be typical compassion and empathy I would normally associate with hearing other people's stories and revealed my own untreated trauma from experiences with the Catholic church. This was

something that I needed to be conscious of moving forward and specifically when approaching the data analysis portion of the research study.

A final reflection that emerged from my reflexive journal was how challenging it was for me to work through my own anxiety at various points of the research process. I identify as a very task orientated person; I create lists every day of what I would like to accomplish, plan short- and long-term goals, and I can really struggle without structure. This process really shone a light on my inability to go with the natural flow of things, to the point where at times I was even losing sleep over it. Because this was a new process for me, I felt the constant need to micro-manage each aspect and would constantly overthink conversations I had about my research and stressing about unreturned emails/texts. With the ongoing and relentless patience of my supervisor, I would need to reflect on the foundations of an Indigenous Research Methodology and trust in the process. In thinking about where this anxiety comes from, throughout my journals I discovered that this mentality is so engrained in western frameworks to my formal education, how I understand success and what I have been taught about being successful. The overplanning and diligence to 'cross off tasks' from my never-ending list was so engrained into my studies and work that allowing things to naturally progress was incredibly challenging. This anxiety has served me in other ways up until this point in my education and is one of the reasons I have been successful in post-secondary institutions. My ability to complete many tasks, hit important deadlines, stay on top of courses I teach, committee work, and so on. Completing a research study using an Indigenous Research Methodology during a global pandemic required me to realign previous behaviors that I had learned out of survival.

Context

COVID-19

To provide some necessary context, while the study was being completed, we were going through a global health crisis. From the completion of my candidacy right through until the data analysis, this entire study was conducted during a time where we were prohibited to speak with community members and participants face to face because of provincial health restrictions. This presented several challenges. First, it disrupted plans that I had to engage community members and inquire about potential participants at ceremonies and community events. When I was writing my proposal, I was going to connect with individuals who I regularly would see at a Sweat Lodges, Sun Dances, Pow Wows and Round Dances. With all events being cancelled for the entire process of this research, I needed to heavily rely on community relationships that had been established prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Each of the participants for this study were identified by individuals that I have been in relationships for years and in various capacities. To provide an example, when I approached two women that I have attended several ceremonies with over the years, she had immediately suggested participant one. When she connected us through a group text, she stated that "I just want you to know *Bush Rock Woman* (participant 1), that I trust Kelsey, she is a kind human being, and I wouldn't have sent her your way if I didn't feel like she had good intentions". This statement reflected the value of being invested into community and how our research begins long before a study occurs and continues long after the study is completed. Without having made previous connections within the community, I believe it would have been exceedingly difficult to find participants if not impossible.

Another way the global pandemic impacted this study was through the offering of protocol, honorariums, as well as how I would have normally approached interviewing participants. Protocol and honorariums were offered to participants by a contactless drop off

process, where I would drop off the items and then explain over the phone their significance and purpose. There was even one situation where I was offering protocol to a participant, it was -30 degrees outside, and was snowing. The protocol was left on the stairs of her house, and I was speaking to her on the phone in the freezing weather from across the street. It is safe to say that this is not how this process usually occurs, but we needed to adapt to the constantly changing environment to keep everyone safe. Lastly, the COVID-19 restrictions impacted the actual interviews with participants as they were all conducted through digital platforms. Conducting the interviews through a digital platform meant that we were not able to eat together as I would have liked, it made reading body language much more difficult, and we were constantly at the mercy of a stable internet connection. Despite all the adaptions and challenges the global pandemic presented, the participants and I were still able to form a strong connection through speaking about their experiences.

Larger Social Context

When looking at the larger social context, it is also important to include and understand what was happening in our society and within Indigenous communities during the months of conducting interviews. The interviews were conducted during the peak months of the summer that there was a lot of media coverage on the finding of unmarked graves on Indian Residential School properties. As an Indigenous person and having members of my family being Indian Residential School survivors, these months were emotional and at times difficult to navigate. While I was trying to process the news reports of thousands and thousands of unmarked graves discovered, the participants of this study had also commented on how it was impacting them. All three participants were the children and/or grandchildren of Indian Residential School survivors and we spoke about the discoveries many times throughout our

interviews together. In our discussions, we were all in various places of our healing processes and the intergenerational impacts of Indian Residential Schools impacted each of us differently.

Analyzing the Data

The process of data analysis occurred in many distinct stages. The interviews were transcribed, and notes were written in a reflexive journal in between interviews and participants. I would ensure that the participants were able to read over the notes collected and transcription of our interviews a few days prior to us meeting. We would spend the first part of our interviews reviewing what we spoke about in the previous interview and would make any corrections if needed. We were able to discuss any observations I had, and this also allowed the participants expand on areas that they had thought about in between our meetings. On several occasions participants would begin our next interview with comments such as: "I was thinking about that second question throughout the past few weeks, and I want to add…".

From here, the data was coded and there were thematic groupings. The participants comments, notes from my reflexive journal, and observations were reviewed, and initial themes were identified. These themes were identified based on comments or details that I found relevant, of significance, or identified by participants as being important. This portion of the data analysis required me to sit with the data over a period. I needed to identify the root of what the participants were saying on an individual basis before I identified themes that were present across all participants.

The next stage of analysis included the application of the study's theoretical framework which included three major areas; policy, relation to others, and understanding of self (see chapter 1, p. 12). With the general themes I identified, I needed to understand them through the

lens of the theoretical framework of this study. This moved and organized the data into themes and subthemes.

Summarizing/Revisiting the Context

One of the initial questions asked to the participants was about their experiences within the child welfare system. Each participant explored their own stories of navigating the Child Welfare system in an urban setting and identified the impact that policy and relationships had on their identity development as an Indigenous person. Each participant had been involved in various aspects of the government provided care and received multiple placements through kinship care, foster care, government run group homes, as well as transitional housing for youth who were aging out (T-SIL and SIL). The reason for apprehension varied between participants. Two of the participants were removed due to substance abuse, unstable housing, and domestic violence in the home. The third participant was placed into a residential group home setting through a mutual agreement with her biological mother because of ongoing disagreements and altercations.

The participants would receive multiple placements both in the city of Edmonton and surrounding areas/communities. Oftentimes, placements would be short-term, with the participants being shuffled from placement to placement based on bed availability. Participants shared stories of being placed with a family or in a group home, initially things would go smoothly, but due to placement breakdown they would be abruptly moved to another placement where the process would begin again. Participants spoke about how this process was traumatic for them, and they can still feel the impacts of this as adults.

The relationships the participants had during their various placements directly impacted their Indigenous identity development. With the constant shuffling from placement to placement,

the participants lived with non-Indigenous caregivers and the messaging surrounding Indigenous culture, identity, and people was negative. Participants did state that there were placements that did promote positive identity, but oftentimes this revolved around sports, exploring other cultures, or completing their education. Identifying with a sport or investing into their education was how they were able to find purpose and belonging, which they stated was lacking from a cultural identity perspective. These relationships impacted how they understood their own identity and participants noted that as an adult they have the challenging task of unlearning the messaging they received growing up.

Two of the participants stated that they were able to reconnect to their Indigenous culture and identity, or they had established this strong connection prior to entering the Child Welfare system. They spoke at length about significant relationships they had before entering care or after they aged out of the Child Welfare system that really impacted how they see and understand themselves as Indigenous women. The experience of "Indigenous" and unconditional love was stated as the foundation and/or turning point of self-discovery, returning to the culture, and healing from the trauma they have experienced throughout their lives.

Moral Courage

In one of my first conversations with a potential participant, after explaining the purpose of the study and the areas of interest for data collection, *Bush Rock Woman* calmly responded with "group homes are an extension of the Indian Residential Schools." When I embarked on this study, it is important to note that it was not my intention to come to such bold conclusions. While I was familiar with Indigenous scholars making connections between Indian Residential Schools, the sixties scoop, and our current over-representation of Indigenous youth in the Child Welfare

system (Episkenew, 2009; Blackstock, 2008; Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017),

I was admittedly naïve and blinded by my own good intentions in my practice as a Child and

Youth Care Practitioner. I worked in the field for just shy of a decade and my passion for

supporting Indigenous youth in care is what led me to this study in the first place. As I began my

data analysis and exploring the literature on the negative impacts current policies have on

Indigenous identity development of survivors of the child welfare system, I came across an

article written by Cindy Blackstock (2008) calling on social workers and Child Welfare service

providers to have moral courage. Blackstock defines moral courage as "standing up for the right

thing when negative repercussions are anticipated, having courageous conversations, and

blowing the whistle on longstanding rights violations to press for better services for clients even

if it requires rocking the boat" (p. 36). To fully commit to improving our existing system for

Indigenous youth in care, it requires an honest and critical reflection of how our Child Welfare

system policies have caused and continue to cause damage. The most emotionally challenging

part of conducting this study was realizing and admitting that, as a Child and Youth Care

practitioner, I am complicit. As Blackstock (2008) states, "we cannot give a moral hall pass to

the support worker bystander who allows injustice to exist or embolden silence" (p. 36). The data

from this study identified specific practices that were particularly harmful in developing a

positive Indigenous identity, and in my ten years of experience in the field, I have at times

blindly enforced these practices and procedures. While it would be easy to blame upper

management in social service agencies, lack of funding/resources, or simply accepting the excuse

"that is just the way it is," a real commitment to change requires self-reflection and

accountability. As a Child and Youth Care practitioner, I have been part of the problem.

Policy

It was through their narratives that they were able to identify existing Child Welfare policies that negatively impacted how they felt about and understood their Indigenous identity. Through the interviews, participants identified the apprehension process, the separation of siblings, and mandatory transition to semi-independent living as negatively impacted how they see and understand themselves as Indigenous peoples. All three participants in this study were involved within the Child Welfare System, and all three participants had returned or attempted to return as practitioners in the Child and Youth Care field as adults. Being a child in care and working within the existing system as adults, the participants provided unique perspectives on the limitations our system, both historically and currently have in supporting positive identity development for our youth. Even though participants varied in age (25, 30, and 44), there was consistency in responses regarding specific practices and consequences to those practices in the field today.

Circumstances of Apprehension

In the data collection process when participants were sharing their stories, they spoke about their experiences moving through the system with their siblings and the multiple placements that they had. *Bush Rock Woman* and Robyn both commented on their experiences before they were apprehended. Both stated that there were reasonable grounds for them to be apprehended from their parents and that their living circumstances were not great. There was the use of drugs and alcohol; unstable housing circumstances that required them to move around a lot; memories of abuse; and poverty. Both participants stated that apprehension was necessary because they were in an unsafe environment at the time. The Child Welfare System at this point was serving its function by removing the children from an unsafe environment. It is from this point on that a more

critical analysis is necessary to evaluate if the system was both built and functioning in a way that was acting in the best interest of the child, specifically an Indigenous child.

The circumstances in which the two participants were apprehended were based on neglect and substance use, and the children were not returned to their biological parents because they were unable to meet certain standards of living and environment determined by the caseworker. While the participants did not state at any point that they should not have been apprehended, the reasons for apprehension align with the research data of many other Indigenous children and families in the Child Welfare system.

"The overrepresentation of Indigenous children in child welfare is driven by neglect and intrinsically tied to a history of state sponsored cultural genocide…It must be understood in the context of past and ongoing settler colonialism imposed on Indigenous communities, generations of forced separation of families and placement of children in the culturally unfamiliar and damaging settings, and the multiple generations of trauma as well as contemporary economic, social, and cultural disenfranchisement" (TRC, 2015 cited in Caldwell, p. 503).

Our Child Welfare system, a Eurocentric framework, including theory, practice, and methodology, is applied to evaluate Indigenous families parenting, living environment, and determining best interest of the child (Chaote & Lindstrom, 2017). Individuals from outside the community are given authority through public policy to determine whether the Indigenous child should remain with their biological parents or be moved based on a set of standards determined by the evaluators cultural orientation. This form of assessment has been heavily criticized as noted in Caldwell and Sinha (2020), including the prioritization of material needs in determining neglect which can be symptoms of poverty (p. 493), the loose conceptualization of neglect within policy (p. 449), and lack of acknowledgement for cultural elements of child rearing (p. 501). While neglect includes the relational needs of a child, oftentimes it is material neglect that causes children to be removed from their homes. Material neglect can include not having nutritious food; the child

is hungry; house is not clean; not having the appropriate clothing for the weather; not taking the child to the doctor; not changing a baby's diaper regularly; and/or your child is not attending school regularly (Korbin et. al., 2000). All forms of material neglect can be remedied with access to resources and community supports. While there needs to be investigations into child maltreatment, during these initial investigations of neglect, Indigenous children are removed from their families and placed into foster care at a rate of 13 times more than non-Indigenous children (Caldwell & Sinha, 2020, p. 485). Although there is recognition of the harm Indian Residential Schools (Truth and Reconciliation of Canada, 2012) and the Sixties Scoop (Sinclair, 2007) have caused, the reality is that the proportion of First Nations children in Child Welfare has reached record levels eclipsing both the Sixties Scoop and Residential Schools (Blackstock, 2010). The over apprehension of Indigenous children has never really stopped. We have simply rebranded the methods to separate Indigenous children from their families (McKenzie et al. 2016).

The intervention process focuses on the removal of the child and leaves the biological Indigenous parents with unrealistic expectations to have them returned. Bush Rock Woman spoke to how placing unrealistic expectations on parents to have their children returned is still an ongoing practice in our existing systems. She states that when they were apprehended that her mother "really tried at first, but there were so many hoops that she needed to jump through," and she eventually stopped trying. These 'hoops,' are court mandated requirements that the parent must complete to regain custody of their child/children. Depending on the specific reason or reasons for apprehension, the parents may be required to: abstain from alcohol or substance use; complete a court approved parenting course; find and secure stable housing; find employment; removing other people from the household that pose a risk to the child; and/or accessing community mental health supports (Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, 2000). When

first apprehended they are placed on a temporary guardianship order and if the parents are not able to meet the requirements within a certain timeframe, 9 months for children under six and 12 months for children over 6, there will be an application for a Permanent Guardianship Order (Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, 2000). The challenges that Indigenous parents face when attempting to get their children back continue to this day and does not account for the hundreds of years of government policy that systematically places Indigenous peoples at a social, economic, and political disadvantage. As a result of Canadian federal policy, "systemic and institutionalized structures have emerged that are enabling and encouraging overrepresentation (Sinclair, 2016, p. 21). This form of child protection and over apprehension does not support reunification and healing but a part of the ongoing fracturing of Indigenous communities (Caldwell, 2020). This fracturing of Indigenous families and community has been ongoing since the creation of the Indian Act and the colonialism around Child Welfare has never really been disrupted (Sinclair, 2007).

Separation of Siblings

Bush Rock Woman and Robyn stated that they came from large families and that when they were apprehended, they were split up from their siblings. Both participants stated how devastating this was for them and how it really impacted their overall well-being. Bush Rock Woman reflected on how the separation was difficult, she had needed to play the role of mom for so long and then they were all abruptly separated to placements across the city. Robyn added that after the separation, she just remembers feeling confused and constantly wondering where everyone had gone. Rast & Rast (2014 cited in Seale & Damiani-Taraba, 2017) noted in a research study of sibling co-placements that when entering care siblings can serve to buffer against the worst effects of trauma of abuse, neglect and removal, and the bonds between siblings may become protective

factors supporting emotional health (Seale & Damiani-Taraba, 2017). Henry (2005) adds that lack of contact with siblings can lead to the child experiencing identity confusion with the revolving door of caregivers and experience tremendous and numerous loses. The participants deeply cared for their siblings and spoke about their efforts to continue that connection with them even as adults.

Similarly, the Indian Residential School system encouraged and enforced the separation of siblings when the Indigenous children attended the schools. De Leeur (2007) conducted a study with Indian Residential School survivors and found that the sibling separation was especially painful for survivors, and it was enforced to break familial bonds (p. 351). One survivor stated "we got punished for even talking to them! Even looking at them!" and another participant stated that "they always made us forget our own family! (De Leeur, 2007, p. 351-352). The practice of separating Indigenous siblings has been ongoing through the Indian Residential Schools, the Sixties Scoop, and our existing Child Welfare system. The TRC (1996) have shown that assimilation through separation and fragmentation was at the heart of the IRS (Indian Residential Schools), Sixties Scoop and the continuing over representation of Indigenous children in care.

As a practitioner in the field, concerns around sibling separation would often be overlooked and justified by the lack of placements available. Throughout my time spent working in residential group home care I received several phone calls from different service providers asking if we could take one, two, or more youth based on how many beds we had that were empty. *Bush Rock Woman* and Robyn both stated that because they were from a family with five siblings that they were paired off and placed where there was room. Social workers and Child and Youth Care workers feel immensely the pressures of working within a system that is unable to uphold what itis mandated to do. Advocating for clients, attempting to support clients and the organization, and

witnessing clients going though these traumatic events leads to a high burnout rate, secondary and vicarious trauma, as well as compassion fatigue amongst practitioners (Schiff & Lane, 2016). Burnout and stress can lead to depersonalization, and a desensitization to the trauma they are witnessing. When there are no options available, although we know we should keep siblings together, we do not. Caseworkers are working with what they have, which is a heavy caseload and not enough resources to go around, and they do not have enough placements available to accommodate large families during the already traumatic experience of being apprehended…this is a system failure (Blackstock, Brown, Bennett,2007). It speaks to a larger systematic issue that can be traced back to chronic underfunding of social services and enforcing policies that our existing system and structure cannot ethically uphold. This system is not working for the practitioners within the sector and the individuals it serves.

Semi-Independent Living

All three participants were placed in a Semi-Independent Placement as they were preparing to age out of care. Current policy within our Child Welfare system has an aging out of care plan for when youth reach a certain age. While the age has changed over the years, from 18 to 24, and most recently from 24 to 22, all three participants spoke about the transitioning out of care process. Youth in the child welfare system are transitioned to TSIL (temporary semi-independent living) houses and then to SIL (semi-independent living) placements. These placements work with the youth to prepare them to move out independently and stop receiving support from the government (housing, food, clothing, etc.). All three participants admitted that this is where they saw a significant derailment in their lives.

Bush Rock Woman stated that she was happily living in a group home with her siblings and that she was forced to move into a SIL placement because she was almost 18. The placement

required her to move schools, leave friends and family, and even move back to Edmonton. When she moved into the shared living with other youth, *Bush Rock Woman* said that this is where she got into some serious trouble, using drugs and alcohol, stopped going to school, hanging with the wrong crowd. Robyn stated that she too was moved into a SIL placement, and her substance use escalated so much that the youth workers expressed concern over her frequent hospitalizations due to drinking related problems. During these transitional housing placements, participants noted increased substance use, attempted suicides, hospitalizations, and drop in school attendance.

The stories that the participants shared reminded me of stories from my grandmother about her Indian Residential School experiences. My Kokum said that when she finished her schooling at St. Michaels Indian Residential School in Saskatchewan, that she returned home to herreserve. She stated that there was nowhere for her to live…that there was no food…there was no work…she had no clothes. She explained that it was an exceedingly challenging time for her andthat when the Armed Forces came to her reserve to recruit, that she did not see that there were anyother options for her. The Armed Forces would give her a bed to sleep in, food to eat, clothes to wear, a paycheck. So, she signed up to serve, and as a result she lost her Indian Status through theIndian Act. She said that she needed to sign a letter stating that she was forfeiting her Indian statusto join the Armed Forces.

The connection I want to make here is that the children were apprehended and moved through a system and then left to fend for themselves. All participants would agree that they were not ready to be living independently, but the government decided that its duty was done and that they were no longer responsible for them. The abrupt end of services had a negative impact on the

participants and led to increase substance use, decline in mental health, attempted suicides, and loss of interest in school and activities.

Non-Indigenous Placements

In sharing their stories, the participants all noted that when there was involvement with Child Welfare that they were moved to substitute care environments known as 'placements' (Navia et al., 2018). The placements ranged from kinship (placements with family members and relatives), foster (placed in households typically with Eurocentric family units), and residential group homes (shared living of other apprehended youth with designated custody to an agency). The overwhelming majority of placements mentioned by participants were non-Indigenous households, non-Indigenous meaning little to no connection to their Indigenous culture, Indigenous people, and/or communities. While many provinces and territories do not track the proportion of Indigenous children living in non-Indigenous homes, the British Columbia Children's Commissioner reported that despite a statutory requirement to give preference to Aboriginal homes, only 2.5 percent of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care were placed in race-matched homes (Trockme, Knoke, Blackstock, 2004). From the interviews, the participants were placed with families that were: Caucasian, Vietnamese, Ukrainian; and practicing: Christians, Catholics, and Buddhists. As noted in the data presentation, there were a few instances where the participant benefitted from the culturally diverse experiences; however, when reflecting on their experiences of non-Indigenous placements the participants spoke at length about the negative impacts it had on their Indigenous identity development.

(Dis) Placement

When sharing their stories of both apprehension and the constant shuffling from placement to placement throughout their childhoods and adolescents, participants could recall vivid memories of being pulled from their homes by police officers and caseworkers. Robyn shared that although she was young, she can still remember the police banging on the door and trying to hide with her siblings so they would not be found. Similarly, *Bush Rock Woman* shared a story of a kinship placement breaking down and how they were urgently and abruptly removed from their home and placed in a completely new setting. These traumatic experiences have been noted in other studies (Navia et al., 2018) and has been conceptualized not as placement, but given the history of how these practices have distanced Indigenous youth from their families, communities, and connections, it is better understood as (dis)placements (p. 149). Furthermore, Navia et al. (2018) argues that "the term placement omits mention of a young person's ties to their community and the loss that Indigenous families experience when children are entirely removed from their sphere of influence" (p. 149). This removal moves beyond their relationship to land and place, but extends to relationships they have established in community, cultural connections, and experiences. This (dis)placement not only occurred for *Bush Rock Woman* and Robyn at the initial apprehension, but all participants experienced (dis)placement during abrupt placement breakdowns and being forced to move. *Bush Rock Woman* noted that when the placements broke down that "you would only have a few minutes to pack your bag…you didn't get to say goodbye to friends at school, or teachers…you had to start all over again." *Bush Rock Woman* stated that this still impacts her as an adult. As an adult, Bush Rock Woman stated that you never really get comfortable in one place. "Even if you have been living there for a while and things are going well, you are always waiting for things to fall apart." Participants were moved because of physical abuse by a caregiver,physical altercations with other youth in the placement, or the results of other altercations in the

home that did not have anything to do with them. Robyn reflected on her long-term foster care placement breakdown and stated that her foster mother of ten years "didn't even fight for us" …she felt "angry and insecure." Bush Rock Woman and Robyn both stated that due to the abrupt movement between placements and another separation from their sibling, they began to act out using substances to cope. Indigenous children who are bounced around from placement to placement with little therapeutic transitional support are at a significant risk of seeking belong and discovering identity with the support of deviant street peers (Tait, Henry, Walker, 2013). The outcomes of the (dis)placement of Indigenous youth in care has been "linked to issues of identity and loss of sense of place" (Navia et al., 2018, p. 149) and multiple placements of Indigenous youth has a direct correlation with increased rates of incarceration and homelessness, higher rates of pregnancy and increased experiences of violence in intimate relationships (Riley, 2003 cited in Tait, Henry, Walker, 2013, p. 47). The loss experienced during the apprehension process can disrupt or arrest the spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical development of the child (Carriere, 2008). The participants of this studied identified loss in terms of no longer having a relationship with their biological parents, loss of placements with their siblings, loss of friends and teachers in school and sports, and loss of familiarity and comfort in their living situation. In total, the three participants identified 17 different placements throughout their time in care. That is 17 separate times that they had to start all over again.

Lack of Cultural Mirrors

As mentioned, the placements or (dis)placements of the participants were mostly with non-Indigenous caregivers. While Luciann welcomed the experiences of living with a non-Indigenous family in her placement, *Bush Rock Woman* and Robyn discussed how it had a detrimental impact on how they saw and understood their Indigenous identity. As children, *Bush Rock Woman* and

Robyn both stated that they constantly felt as though they did not belong and that they were different. *Bush Rock Woman* stated that "the placement lacked Indigenous anything, there was a complete lack of knowledge for anything Indigenous…it made me hate myself even more…I felt like I didn't belong." *Bush Rock Woman*'s feelings of not belonging were further compounded by her being gay, "I was gay in a Christian home…I use to go to church and sit there…you know, if you are gay, you're going to hell…and I use to think in Sunday school God, what's wrong with me?". Robyn shared similar feelings when discussing her long-term placement with her foster family. Like the experiences of Sixties scoop survivors,' in transracial adoptees/caregiver agreements, many former children in foster care or who were adopted experience significant identity issues because they were socialized and acculturated into a middle-class white society (Hall, 1995; Gilchrist, 1995; Richard, 1998 cited in Raven 2013, p. 69). *Bush Rock Woman* commented that she would begin to replicate whatever the placement care givers did as asurvival technique. "When they prayed, I prayed…what they ate, I ate…what they believed, I would appear to believe."

In exploring the experiences of Indigenous youth with involvement with the Child Welfare System, whether through the adoption and foster care process, Raven (2007) states that "developing a cultural identity when raised in a different cultural context is extremely difficult as there is a lack of cultural mirrors in their social environments" (p. 71-72). This lack of cultural mirrors can be seen in Robyn's experiences of constantly feeling like she did not belong, even as a child she would look around her church groups and social circles and she knew that she was different. As a young child, Robyn would even find herself scanning the crowds for people who looked like her and found herself searching for her family… "we use to go swimming every

day and would go to a local pool…as a kid I would always be looking around the pool and if I saw a native person I would think, is that my mother?"

With the lack of cultural mirrors, *Bush Rock Woman* and Robyn were then presented with narratives by multiple caregivers that portrayed Indigenous people as addicted, poor, unholy, and violent (Sinclair, 2007). *Bush Rock Woman s*hared that in several of her placements that the caregivers believed many of the stereotypes about Indigenous people. "They believed all the stereotypes, about welfare, about poor people, drugs and alcohol…they were prejudice and ignorant…words stick with you." *Bush Rock Woman* stated that the caregivers' beliefs about Indigenous people encouraged self-hate. In addition, Robyn added that her foster mother expressed a strong dislike for anything Indigenous. Because they were deeply religious and believed in God, anything Indigenous was believed to be "evil, fake and devil worship." Robyn did not have much exposure to Indigenous people and when she did, as a child she found it to be a terrifying experience. There was so little connection to Indigenous culture and people. Robyn shared a story about when she saw other Indigenous people, she was terrified and seeing them brought back memories of fear. Tait's (2000) study of Indigenous children in care similarly found that when parents were framed as bad, addicted, or violent, it was very painful for the children and in some instances, this led to the children rejecting their Indigenous identity (p. 46). Robyn stated, "this is something that is very difficult to unlearn as an adult."

The combination of having no cultural mirrors, the loss of family kinship, and living in a society that continues to discriminate against Indigenous peoples, all these factors contributed to their intense struggles when they tried to come to terms with their Indigenous identity (Holly et. al, 2016, p. 7). As an adult Robyn added that "I identify as Indigenous, but I don't follow through…it's really hard to get away from that (beliefs about Indigenous culture) when that is

what you were taught for so long." *Bush Rock Woman* expressed that she had difficulty overcoming these preconceptions, but both *Bush Rock Woman* and Luciann had different experiences regarding positive relationships that impacted a positive identity development which will be explored in later sections.

Understanding of Indigenous Identity- Finding the Light

In the overwhelmingly present themes of harm, trauma, and loss that participants discussed, there was also a strong and distinct message about the power of love and connection. Each of the participants spoke about the significant people and relationships in their lives that impacted their identity development throughout their childhood, adolescence and into adulthood. These significant relationships varied from participant to participant and impacted their identity development in diverse ways. For Luciann, she identifies her grandparents and aunt that she lived with early on in her life. They taught me to "live the Sundance way" early on, and she felt secure enough in her identity that being placed in non-Indigenous placements did not have a negative impact on her Indigenous identity. The relationship Luciann had with her aunt and grandparents taught her how to live day to day from an Indigenous worldview, the importance of Indigenous kinship, respecting everything around you, and the sacredness of ceremony. Bush Rock Woman spoke about a meaningful relationship she developed with both Terri and Jack, caregivers who would take her and her siblings after they had been in care for 14 years. It was in meeting Terri and Jack that Bush Rock Woman stated that she "felt sincere love…I knew that they cared for me, and I could feel it." Robyn, the third participant, expressed that she felt a disconnect with who she was an Indigenous person and did not share any stories like what *Bush Rock Woman* and Luciann experienced. She did however speak to strong relationships she had made with teachers and Child and Youth Care practitioners that she

believes changed the trajectory of her life. Robyn stated that being in care for much of her life, she "thrived for connection…and I still have many of those connections (with teachers and Child and Youth Care practitioners) to this day."

During the difficult transitions of apprehension and multiple placements, the participants spoke to the value and connections they made through education and extracurricular activities. Bush Rock Woman spoke about playing basketball in junior high, Robyn spoke about being a competitive swimmer for over ten years, and Luciann spoke to the importance education played throughout her life. While the sport-for-development approach is heavily criticized for using modern sport as a cultural replacement for Indigenous youth (Arellano & Downey, 2019), extracurricular activities provided the participants an escape. Robyn stated that swimming "was an outlet, it let me build a different identity…I really cared about it…it gave me purpose." In the absence of cultural connections, sport became a space for the participants to develop their own identity. In terms of Indigenous identity development, sport and education did not promote a deeper understanding of their Indigenous identity; however, it did connect the youth to the Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals that would support them into adulthood. The basketball gym, the swimming pool and the classroom is where the participants found meaningful connections with an adult. All three participants identified these caring individuals that they met through sport and education as making a positive difference in their lives.

Indigenous Identity is Relationships

During the interviews with participants, both Luciann and Bush Rock Woman expressed that as adults they positively identified with their Indigenous identity. In defining what is Indigenous identity to them, Luciann stated that it is "grounded in Indigenous kinship, it is forgiveness, a belief that everything is connected and has a spirit…that you live in ceremony

from the moment you wake up till the moment you go to sleep." Bush Rock Woman defines Indigenous identity as unconditional love…my relationship with Terri shaped the way I understood myself…when you are shown love you grow differently." Bush Rock Woman added that with all the negative messaging about being Indigenous it really led to self-hate, and it was only through her relationship with Terri that she was able to experience self-love. Luciann and Bush Rock Woman understood and articulated Indigenous identity through relationships. Their identity was developed through feeling "unconditional love," the quiet moments sitting with a grandparent, and being brought into ceremonial spaces with someone who cared for them. It was through these connections that they were able to develop an understanding of who they were as Indigenous women. The connection they felt went beyond the basic understandings of a caregiver and into a realm of connecting with something inside of them that had previously been untouched or never felt. A connection with their spirit.

As I entered the research study with participants, I understood my role was an oskâpêwis. I was to treat this research process as a ceremony and my own experiences assisting with women's sweats informed my understanding of relationality. McAdam (2015) defines an oskâpêwis as the sacred helpers, male or female, who led the way during our ceremonies (p. 21). Collecting data over the summer months and with COVID restrictions limiting ceremonies, I spent a lot of time reflecting on the Sundance. I danced for many years, surrounded by people I deeply cared about. In between interviews I was always reflecting on those scorching summer days and could always vividly remember the oskâpêwis waking us up in the early morning hours. "Ahaw…pitokwek…the ancient call from the oskâpêwis that would give you permission to enter the lodge (McAdam, 2015, p. 21). Their call was always gentle, and they would slowly wake you up and let you know it was time to get ready for the ceremony.

In hearing the participants stories about the impact their grandparents and Terri had on their identity development, I could immediately recognize the role these individuals in our communities. These individuals were described by participants as loving, protecting, and modelling the Cree way of life. They cared for the participants, with no blood relation, with no hidden agenda, with no formal paperwork to assign custody, with no other reason than for love. These individuals accepted the participants for who they were and let them explore their identity on their own terms. Reflecting on this role has been extremely emotional, as I too have felt this love before. When reflecting on these individuals in our communities:

Ahaw pitokwek…they have quietly been calling back our children to the ceremony.

The Experience

During one of the first interviews, *Bush Rock Woman* shared the story of attending her first sweat lodge with Terri and how it was a defining moment in her life. Being in the sweat lodge with someone who cared for her, hearing the ceremonial songs, and smelling the medicines, *Bush Rock Woman* was overwhelmed with emotion and cried. She stated that after everything she had gone through, being in this space (sweat lodge), it was "the first time in my life I was able to really cry." While she was sharing this story, I was completely struck how she had described her experience. Her description of what she experienced was unmistakably like my own in hearing the drum for the first time. As I had stated in the first chapter, it was this experience for me that started my own healing journey and part of the reason of how I ended up at this study in the first place. This moment of reconnection can serve as a "invitation to reclaim stories, healing practices, ceremonies, and the power of recovering identity (Sheppard, 2020, p. 53). Throughout this study, both within the literature review as well as the data analysis, much of it focuses on the devastating impacts colonization has had on Indigenous peoples in Canada. This

study has looked at historical and contemporary policies that have been employed to rid the Indigenous culture and identity from Indigenous people. These experience that Bush Rock Woman shared suggests hope. There is an experience or phenomena that can occur that supersedes hundreds of years of colonization and oppression and can spiritually reconnect Indigenous peoples with their culture and identity. With many Indigenous youth being apprehended and incarcerated, understanding these moments of reconnection could provide guidance to support workers on how to reconnect our youth.

Discussion and Towards a Final Analysis

Our existing Child Welfare system continues to cause harm to Indigenous children in care. The continued apprehension of Indigenous children from their families and communities, the separation of siblings, and forcing youth into adulthood before they are ready is negatively impacted their Indigenous identity development. The placement and constant displacement of our youth further complicates their identity development when their living environments are both lacking cultural mirrors and messaging Indigenous identity and culture as less than. In reviewing federal policies surrounding the Indian Act, Indian Residential Schools, the Sixties Scoop, and the current realities within our existing Child Welfare system, can we clearly identify where one policy ends and the other begins? To demonstrate the overlap and blending of harmful policies, two of the participants shared similar experiences with multiple placements, separation from siblings, non-Indigenous caregivers, and the demonizing Indigenous identity. These participants are 5 years apart in age, one being 25 years old and the other 30 years old. The 30-year-old is eligible for a claim in the ongoing Sixties Scoop survivor's settlement, whereas the 25-year-old is not. Both participants spoke to the harm that was caused during their time in the Child Welfare system, and yet only one of them is being formally apologized to by our federal

government. Similar experiences and yet it was decided that the harm that was caused somehow ended in 1991. As a Child and Youth Care practitioner and educator, I am faced with the question: Are we currently working within a system that we will need to apologize for 20 years from now? And if the answer to this question is yes, when will we stop saying "that's the way it is" and start demanding change? Failure to act can quite literally have life and death consequences for Indigenous youth. One participant stated, "Indigenous ceremonies is suicide prevention." In agreeance I would also add, policy reform for Indigenous children in the child welfare system is suicide prevention.

The relationship between policy, relationships with others, and understanding of our own identity is intertwined. In the stories of participants, policy determined where they were placed and with whom, the caregivers (relationships) provided messaging about Indigenous identity, and the participants were then tasked with navigating their own understanding of who they are as Indigenous peoples. The environment and people that are brought into Indigenous children and youth's lives can have a positive or negative impact on how they see and understand themselves as Indigenous people. Environment and people can be controlled through more effective policy within our Child Welfare system.

In terms of finding the light that emerged from this study, the participants spoke to moments of deep connection and a re-connection to their Indigenous identity. One participant shared that Indigenous identity and culture is "not written anywhere, it is shown to you." The participants who positively identified with their Indigenous identity would repeatedly credit this back to significant relationships they had formed with Indigenous people in their community. It was not necessarily individuals who were blood related or assigned by the government to be a caregiver, but a caring Indigenous adult who provided the safety and unconditional love needed

to begin the journey inwards to self-love and exploration. This connection is sacred. As many others have said before, the answer lies within our communities, our teachings, Elder and ceremonies.

Chapter 6 Summary of Findings and Recommendations for the Future

This chapter will provide an overview of the study, a summary of the findings, and recommendations for future study.

Overview of the study

Indigenous youth in Canada are currently in a state of crisis. Research studies and statistics show that Indigenous youth are overrepresented in our prisons (Office of the Correctional Investigate, 2016), our Child Welfare system (Aboriginal Children in Care Working Group), in suicide rates (Caron, 2005), experiencing homelessness (Patrick, 2014, and underrepresented in areas such as educational completion school (Statistics Canada, 2009) and employment (Kolahdooz, Nader, & Sharma, 2015). Based on my experiences as a Child and Youth Care practitioner where I was able to work alongside Indigenous youth living in residential group homes and shelters, as well as my own experiences of reconnecting to my culture as a Cree woman, in this study I wanted to explore Indigenous identity development in survivors of the child welfare system.

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of Indigenous survivors of the Child Welfare system, the ways in which their identity developed, and identify the ways in which they did/did not feel supported. This research study engaged with the following question: How do urban Indigenous survivors of the Child Welfare system feel about their identity development? Using an Indigenous Research Methodology, I approached this study from an Indigenous paradigm and ensured that cultural protocols were followed to honour the voices of the participants. Participants were selected based on a criterion of: they identify as Indigenous, they were adults (aged 24 and turned 25 during the interviews, aged 30 and aged 44)

and they had lived in a residential group home. The three participants provided their life stories from being in care, they articulated their own understanding of Indigenous identity, and they provided thoughtful and essential feedback from their experiences going through the system. In sharing their deeply personal stories, their reflections on our existing Child Welfareprovided insight to the necessary changes we need to make to better serve our Indigenous youth in care.

This study can be utilized to inform Child and Youth Care practitioners on how to support Indigenous identity development for children and youth in the Child Welfare system. These narratives can impact our existing policies and procedures with how we support Indigenous identity in our institutions, agencies, and society. Personal narratives are a way of humanizing statistics and understanding the real-life implications of public policy. Survivors of the Child Welfare system have the contextual knowledge to speak to how these policies have negatively impacted their lives and equally as important, what is needed to better support the Indigenous identity development of future youth in and entering the system.

This research study involved three participants who identified as Indigenous and were involved with the Child Welfare system. The participants were chosen because they had the lived experiences of being in care and were passionate about providing their insight to potentially better social services for future Indigenous youth going through the system. In finding participants for the study, because we were in the middle of a global pandemic and many Indigenous community events and ceremonies were not happening, I heavily relied on previously established relationships I had with community members that I had met through ceremony. I approached these individuals, explained the study, and they directed me to potential participants. When introduced to the participants, I followed the university protocol and explained the study, purpose, intention, and

what their involvement would be. We discussed and agreed upon the consent forms, and I had both written and verbal confirmation that they understood. Following this, I made an offering of tobacco and cloth to the participants through a contactless drop off. The interviews were conducted and recorded using a virtual format (zoom), I transcribed the interviews verbatim interviews, and notes were taken in a reflexive journal. Notes were transcribed in between meetings, participants were given the written notes prior to the next meeting, and then they were given the opportunity to ensure accuracy and make any required changes through a member checking process. Upon completion of the interviews, participants were given an honorarium (contactless drop off, fifty dollars and a blanket).

The interviews varied in length, usually running from one to two hours per session. There were some unforeseen challenges, mostly around the use of technology instead of doing face to face interviews. The challenges included: the participants having difficulty using the chosen virtual platform and unstable internet connection from both my internet as well as the participants. With these minor glitches, there were a few occasions that we were interrupted and needed to resume our conversation after reconnecting. The interviews were at times very emotional for both the participants and me. While I had the assumption that the use of technology was going to severely disrupt the relational aspects of the interview process, there were many instances where the participant and I were laughing and crying together. Being able to connect with the participants on a personal and emotional level through a screen speaks to the power of connection and relationship.

Upon completion of each interview with all participants, I transcribed each interview by reviewing the audio recordings of our sessions and including notes and contextual information I had made while conducting the interviews. After all interviews were completed with all three

participants, the data collected was then placed into a running document. The data was then organized/coded based on similarities between participants responses to the research question and sub-questions. I then looked for common thematic groupings that appeared within the data and referred to my theoretical framework to provide guidance on how the themes would be structured and organized. The data was organized based on the interrelationship between the three components: policy, relation to others, and understanding of self.

Summary of the Findings

The research findings in Chapter Four: Data Presentation, were based on conversations with participants answering open-ended questions, the initial research question of this study and for sub-questions. The sub-questions were: a) Tell me about your experiences in the Child Welfare System b) What does Indigenous identity mean to you? c) As a youth in care, in what ways did you feel you supported/not supported in your Indigenous identity development? d) What changes can be made in the Child Welfare field to support positive Indigenous identity for children and youth in care? The responses from these sub questions informed and supported the initial research question: How do urban Indigenous survivors of the Child Welfare system feel about their identity development? The data was organized using the psycho-socio-political theoretical framework: Indigenous identity is impacted of policy, the relationship with others, and the understanding of self.

Our existing policies have negatively impacted urban Indigenous identity development in the survivors of the Child Welfare System. Participants identified specifically the ongoing apprehension of Indigenous children, the separation of sibling groups, and the forced transition into Semi-Independent Living as negatively impacted how they understand themselves as Indigenous people.

Policy

The initial apprehension of two of the participants was based on neglect and substance abuse. Some of the participants would never live with their biological parents again as their parent were unable to meet certain standards of living determined by a government worker. Removing Indigenous children from their home has been ongoing on in Indigenous communities from hundreds of years. A Eurocentric framework, including theory, methodology and practice is applied to Indigenous families with little connection of poverty to ongoing and systematic oppression for hundreds of years (Chaote & Lindstrom, 2017). While we have acknowledged the damage of removing Indigenous children to attend Indian Residential Schools and through the Sixties scoop, the reality is there are more children being apprehended today than the peak of IRS (Indian Residential Schools). Furthermore, participants explained that they were separated from their siblings and moved from placement to placement and were forced out when the government decided its responsibilities have been met.

When we look at how this occurs: children are taken from their parents and siblings because they are deemed unfit, policy is used to give authority, and we use police to enforce authority, it is the same process that has always been used. There has been acknowledgement of the harm that IRS and the 60's scoop caused, from the stories of participants that harm is still being perpetuated.

Relationships with Others

The participants shared that when they were apprehended and brought into the Child Welfare system, when the placement was non-Indigenous it had a negative impact on their Indigenous identity development. Through their placements with kinship, foster care, and residential group homes, they were typically run by non-Indigenous caregivers. These caregivers varied in

ethnicity and religious and cultural backgrounds and the participants were expected and at times forced to align with the placement's beliefs. They experienced regular placement breakdown, where they were forced to pack up all their belongings and start over again.

The constant (dis)placements that the participants experienced disrupted any community, family, or support group ties that they had. With the traumatic experience of being apprehended from their biological parents and separated from their siblings, each time they were required to start over with a new placement they felt a compounded loss. These displacements contributed to issues of identity and the constant moving around is something that participants struggle with even as adults.

The placements were not able to provide the participants with cultural support and/or cultural mirrors. They stated that they always felt like they did not belong and that they learned that to survive you needed to just adapt to whatever the placement did. Participants were required to participate in daily devotions, attend church, pray to various gods (depending on the placement), even if they did not align with any religious organization. It was not an option. Furthermore, the caregivers in many of the placements held prejudice beliefs and assumptions around Indigenous peoples. They would give messaging both direct and indirect about Indigenous culture, believed negative stereotypes about Indigenous peoples, and would tell them that the Indigenous culture was evil and fake. These all promoted self-hate and many of the messages about Indigenous peoples that they received from caregivers made it challenging to unlearn as an adult.

Understanding of Self

The third finding in this study, each participant shared that they were able to establish a meaningful relationship with a caring adult that impacted the way the understood their own identity. While one participant stated that she did feel a disconnect with her Indigenous identity,

she was able to connect with a few professionals that really cared for her and encouraged her to attend post-secondary. The other two participants, when defining their Indigenous identity credited a significant and meaningful relationship that they had. Their understanding of their Indigenous identity was impacted by feeling a spiritual and loving connection with an extended family member and someone from their community. Indigenous identity is relationships.

They speak about an experience that they had when they were supported by someone and ceremony. This experience and connection move beyond basic understandings around the concept of love and they identified it as a defining moment in their lives. This phenomenon, included feeling loved, hearing drums, smelling medicines, and an overwhelming feeling of emotion. It was a connection with their spirit. This moment of connection was what led them back into the ceremonies, back into the culture, and impacted how they understand their identity. These community members are acting as the oskâpêwis in our communities and are bringing back our youth to the ceremonies.

Recommendations

Policy Reform in the Child Welfare System

The existing policies in our Child Welfare System need to be challenged. The data in this study has showed that our existing policies are causing harm to our Indigenous youth and their identity development. The participants of this study had stated that once they were apprehended from their parents, they were shuffled from placement to placement, they were separated from their siblings, and they were forced into transitional homes when they were about to age out of care. The findings from this study, as well many other studies previously conducted, found that Indigenous youth who have gone through a traumatic apprehension, the separation of siblings,

being moved around to multiple placements, and being forced out of care at a certain age,

experience tremendous and compounded loss. This negatively impacted their feelings around

their identity development and their connection with Indigenous culture. These harmful policies

and the impacts they have are an extension of previous federal policies enforced onto Indigenous

peoples, such as the Indian Residential School system as well as the Sixties Scoop. Policy needs

to be reformed to keep families together (both parents and children, and children with their

siblings), to develop and fund culturally appropriate placements when the child needs to be

removed from their living environment, and the resources to support the healing of the entire

family unit.

Better Training for Non-Indigenous Caregivers

Throughout the interviews, it was clear that there needs to be more training for non-

Indigenous caregivers who provided services to Indigenous children and youth in care.

Participants noted that in several of the placements they had, that caregivers held negative

assumptions and prejudice towards Indigenous peoples. These prejudices were noted how the

children were treated, comments that were made about Indigenous peoples, and parents outright

speaking against Indigenous spirituality and Indigenous culture. The participants stated that it

was these attitudes and beliefs of the caregivers that promoted self-hatred, the rejection of

Indigenous culture in adulthood, and teaching them negative beliefs about themselves that were

difficult to unlearn. This study recommends that when all avenues have been explored in placing

the child in an Indigenous placement and there are no options, that Indigenous children should

then and only then be placed with non-Indigenous caregivers who have taken various trainings

surrounding Indigenous culture, Indigenous perspectives, and culturally appropriate caregiving for our children.

Investment into Family Reunification

In sharing their experiences, the participants spoke about their parents. While it was difficult for them to speak to all the complexities of their relationships and in some stories the loss of their parent, what I found missing in the participants re-telling is the support their parents were receiving from the government. Many of the biological parents of participants in this study were suffering from substance use issues, were experiencing poverty, housing instability, and all had connections to the Indian Residential School systems. Some of the biological parents were themselves survivors of the schools, day schools, and/or the children of survivors. Understanding what we do about the long-term impacts of trauma, specifically stemming from the Indian Residential Schools, these parents are also victims. Instead of providing them with the support they needed, we apprehended their children and caused more harm. Many of the reasons the participants stated they were apprehended were symptoms of socio-economic distress and the intergenerational impacts of trauma for the Indian Residential Schools. The children stated that their parents had some issues, but at no point in an interview did they say that their parents did not love them. Many of the parents, even when they were suffering with addictions, incarceration, and homelessness, they would find ways to stay connected with their children.

The recommendation is to treat and support all members of the family in healing. We need to provide the funding and resources for the parents to get the support they need to have the family be brought back together. This could be through addictions support, finding and securing stable housing, addressing the symptoms of poverty, individual and family counselling. An unfortunate reality of the Child Welfare system is when a child goes through, when they become

an adult, they can also have their children apprehended. It is a cycle that we are not addressing and what is needed is complete investment into the family as a unity.

The Recruitment and Retainment of Indigenous Practitioners

My final recommendation for this study calls on Post-Secondary Universities, Colleges, as well as social services agencies need to recruit and retain more Indigenous practitioners. Practitioners within the field of Child and Youth Care, Social Work, and other related professionals that provide services to families with government Child Welfare intervention. With the over representation of Indigenous children and youth in care, there needs to be more Indigenous representation not only on the front line with youth, but also in management positions for agencies serving and making decisions for Indigenous families. Participants of this study found that the lack of Indigenous caregivers and/or support workers had a negative impact on their connection to their culture and identity development. Representation in the Child and Youth Care profession and field of Social Work is incredibly low. Universities need to focus on the recruitment and retainment of future Indigenous practitioners and offer certification courses and/or training on and off reserve.

Directions for Future Research

The recommendations and direction for future study were developed from some of the key findings of this research study.

1. Further examine the role of Child and Youth Care practitioners in supporting positive identity development in Indigenous youth in the Child Welfare System. The study focused on the lived experiences of Indigenous survivors of the child welfare system. Through discussions, participants all stated that they had attended a post-secondary institution for Social Work or

Child and Youth Care, and two of the participants were actively working on the front lines with Indigenous youth. Although this was not the focus of my study, there were many areas that could be further explored through a practitioner's perspective. With the Child and Youth Care profession being pre-dominantly non-Indigenous practitioners, their perspective could provide a critical analysis of our existing services and help guide our direction forward in terms of policy and procedures.

2. Revisit the research question: How do Indigenous survivors of the Child Welfare system feel about their identity development? The research question can be revisited to identify and address limitations that arose from the study. In engaging potential participants and in alignment with an Indigenous Research Methodology, when an individual was brought forward by the community and expressed interest in the study, I would invite them to participate. The study had initially set out to conduct interviews with 3-4 participants, 2 male, 2 female, and one member of the LGBTQ2+ community. All the participants brought forward identified as female and/or two spirit. This study gathered stories and reflections of only female identifying participants and therefore, the male perspective was not explored. A future study could revisit the research question from a male perspective.

3. Further examine the experience identified by participants of reconnecting to their culture and identity, that specific moment of spiritual connection. In this study, there were many findings that were difficult to process as a researcher, as an Indigenous woman, and as a Child and Youth Care practitioner. The light for me in this study was when the participants spoke about that connection and/or reconnection to their identity. It was an emotional, life changing moment for them and is deeply significant when looking forward to supporting future Indigenous children and youth who will be brought into the Child Welfare system. Understanding and

articulating that moment and building environments for Indigenous youth to experience those moments, will be my life's work.

Addressing the Research Question

In this study, as a researcher I set out to address the research question: How do urban Indigenous survivors of the Child Welfare system feel about their identity development? This study has required me to reflect on our existing policies and procedures in the Child Welfare system, as well as my own positioning as a Child and Youth Care practitioner. Working with urban Indigenous youth in the Child Welfare system has been my passion for the past 10 years and the findings were devastating to hear. The findings from this study puts into question if we are really doing what is in the best interest of the Indigenous child in care and provides some hope that Indigenous children can reconnect with their Indigenous identity and culture. As an Indigenous scholar, I now have an obligation to continue to seek out the light, and where no light can be found, I must actively work to create some.

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