

Unheard Voices:

Healing Stories of Reclamation and Rebuilding for Families of Missing and
Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit people who have not been
involved in the National Inquiry

Thesis

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Abstract

This work uncovers the stories of relatives who have been impacted by the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit people (MMIWG2S) in Canada, who have not been involved in the National Inquiry into MMIWG2S. Utilizing Indigenous ways of knowing and Indigenous research methodologies in the form of land-based and ceremonial healing during the data collection phase was an integral aspect of this research project. The relatives' stories focus on the actions of police in regard to the death or disappearance of their missing or murdered loved one, their collective and individual methods of healing, as well as their recommendations for policy change with regard to police actions in the cases of their loved ones. This collection of stories proposes and supports policy change for the families of MMIWG2S, through the reclamation of Indigenous ways of knowing and practicing healing in order to rebuild.

Key Words: Indigenous women, healing, decolonization, Indigenous ways of knowing, police, MMIWG2S

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This work is dedicated to my mother, Holly Irene Wolfe (Sinclair). I am truly blessed to do this work in honour of your name and for all of the other women, girls, and two-spirit people who have left to the spirit world long before their time; you are always remembered.

To begin, I want to acknowledge, as an Ininiw Iskewew, the lands where I currently reside and where this thesis took place, Treaty 1 Territory; the traditional lands of the Anishinaabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, Dene Peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation. My special thanks and gratitude go out to the individuals who have been involved in this research; your courage and love shine through your stories. I am so honoured that you have honoured your truth with me and will have others hear the stories you have shared!

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Kinanaskomitinawaw, Ninanaskomon, Ninanaskomon, Ninanaskomon

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My Story (Self-Positioning)

Tanisi, my name is Sawano Mihko Amo wi Pinesis wi Iskwew (Red Hummingbird Woman of the South), and I am a proud member of Kinosao Sipi (Norway House Cree Nation). For as long as I can remember, I have always had an interest in my Indigenous culture and history. Growing up within many different northern communities in Manitoba and being disconnected from my family roots and identity, my interests within my culture only strengthened my desire to find out who I am and where I come from. I am a survivor of the foster care system as well as being of mixed heritage; these things have contributed to my disconnection and my struggle with my own identity as an Ininiw Iskwew (Cree Woman). My family has a long history being part of the 60s scoop and apprehensions throughout the child welfare system; systems that have been implemented through Canada's colonial government. These experiences have reinforced my interest in studying the representation and colonial effects on Indigenous women in Canada, with a specific focus on violence against women and the issue of the missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people.

The death of my mother, who was only 37 years old at the time of her death, created the spark to ignite the powerful fire inside of me to seek healing, not only for myself and my family but for others who are also impacted by this terrible crisis. I feel that these issues are beyond measure and are sadly being overlooked and underrepresented within our country. Only recently have they been highlighted by a national inquiry released in June of 2019 (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls [National Inquiry], 2019). My own negative experience with the Winnipeg Police Service, and their lack of investigation into my mother's death, has haunted me. My mother's death is left unexplained by the police, and I have questioned the police procedures and mishandling of her death for almost 20 years, as there was no investigation into her death. Unfortunately, this has profoundly affected me and my family since her death occurred. The lack of justice is something that I have witnessed for many others much like myself, and although I may not be able to bring families justice, I hope to help them find much-needed comfort and healing through this work.

I have been encouraged to begin my research on the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people within Canada because I want to hopefully deepen healing processes for myself as well as families and individuals who have been affected by circumstances much like my own. I have found my own healing through ceremony and

learning more about myself through exploring my culture and language. This reclamation and rebuilding of my identity was, and still is, an important aspect of not only this research but also throughout my life and my ongoing healing process. Through my previous studies in history and education, I have had many doors open to my understanding and appreciation of the importance of these issues through research, studies, and questioning current and historical events. My studies, not only within Western academic spaces but within myself, my connection to Mother Earth, and my ways of seeing, thinking, being, and doing have impacted this work. A teaching that I was gifted through ceremony is: *We must always be walking in this good way, not only when we are participating in ceremony. Life itself is a ceremony; we must walk it always.* I hope that I have contributed my own personal experience, culture, and worldview, in a good way, to contribute to creating change and healing in relation to this problem. This topic is very important to me, and I hope that by allowing families space to share their experiences with the police investigations of their loved ones' deaths and disappearances as well as integrating methods of land-based, ceremonial, and cultural healing, I may have helped bring comfort to families directly affected. My hope is that this work may spark and open dialogue on the much-needed changes that should be made to further policy formation in regard to missing and murdered indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people (MMIWG2S) in Canada.

Key Terms

<i>MMIWG2S</i>	missing and murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit people.
<i>Marginalization</i>	treatment of a person, group, or concept as insignificant or peripheral.
<i>Othering</i>	an action in which a person has been classified as being “not one of us” in the mind of an individual or a collective group.
<i>Colonization</i>	the action or process of settling among and establishing control over the Indigenous peoples, land, and resources of an area.
<i>Decolonized Methods</i>	the act of using Indigenous voices, epistemologies, and ontologies within the centre of research methods, rather than colonial views.
<i>Traditional Knowledge</i>	knowledge, know-how, skills, and practices that are developed, sustained, and passed on from generation to generation within a community, often forming part of its cultural or spiritual identity.
<i>Land-Based</i>	description of an Indigenous understanding of the world and the inseparability of land and water from one’s health and well-being. This is a key concept in understanding First Nations, Métis, and Inuit worldviews on mental wellness, which is inseparable from emotional, physical, and spiritual health or the land itself.
<i>Ceremony</i>	used for both a context for transferring knowledge and a way to remember the responsibility we have to our relationships with life. It is associated with maintaining and restoring balance, renewal, cultivating relationships, and creative participation with nature.

Chapter One: Background

The problem of the missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people (MMIWG2S) continues to grow, affecting significant numbers of people throughout Canada. Colonial effects on Indigenous women create harmful and negative impacts that continue to increase in intensity and severity. This problem is highlighted in the United Nations' *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People's* Article 22.2, which asserts, "States shall take measures, in conjunction with Indigenous peoples, to ensure that Indigenous women and children enjoy the full protection and guarantees against violence and discrimination" (United Nations General Assembly, 2007, p. 17). The problem of MMIWG2S is beginning to be globally recognized and has garnered some attention within Canada, specifically Manitoba, because of the gravity of the issue in the province as well as the number of women, girls, and two-spirit people who have gone missing or been murdered within the province.

Historically, Indigenous women were highly respected for their life-giving abilities, as this ability was seen as a gift from the Creator and women were looked up to as leaders within their communities (K. Anderson, 2011). Over hundreds of years, with the introduction of the incoming British and French settlers during the onset of colonization, these traditional roles were devalued. Indigenous women were subject to the destruction of their identities, and their social and economic positions in society were negatively impacted, as these traditional roles and practices were sadly stripped away. Countless negative stereotypes and stigmas, which are still associated with Indigenous women in Canada, were created (Acoose, 2016).

The problem of MMIWG2S is closely linked to these contributing factors. Indigenous women have been subject to racism, violence, and marginalization, in large part due to negative colonial effects and imposed social, economic, and political policies and legislations, which have often been controlled and governed through police services. Statistics from 2009 reported that within the previous year, Indigenous women in Canada had experienced almost 140,000 incidents of violence and were nearly three times more likely, in comparison to non-Indigenous women, to report a violent crime committed against them (Brennan, 2011). However, these statistics do not include the number of Indigenous women who do not report incidents of violence; statistics show that Indigenous people have lower confidence, in comparison to non-Indigenous peoples, when dealing with justice systems (namely police), which may attribute to countless unreported cases of violence (Cao, 2014). Additionally, Two-Spirit people have only

most recently been included within data for the statistics of MMIWG2S. In her article “N’tacimowin Inninan Nah” *Our Coming in Stories*¹, Alex Wilson (2008), a Two-Spirit academic, described that the term Two-Spirit is “a self-descriptor used by many Cree and other Aboriginal lesbian, gay, bi, and trans people. When we say that we are two-spirit, we are acknowledging that we are spiritually meaningful people. Two-spirit identity may encompass all aspects of who we are, including our culture, sexuality, gender, spirituality, community, and relationship to the land” (p. 193). Within recent research, it has been found that the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer (LGBTQ), or Two-Spirit community are four times more likely than the general population to experience sexual or physical violence and are 50% more likely than heterosexual Indigenous women to experience violence (Statistics Canada, 2018). These statistics are staggering.

Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people have been subject to violence and abuses inflicted in large part due to societal oppression. Previous studies showed that Indigenous women are extremely vulnerable to being sexually victimized compared to non-Indigenous women (Brennan, 2011; Palmater, 2016). Indigenous women suffer the highest poverty and unemployment rates within Canada, which makes them much more susceptible to higher rates of addiction, being involved in the sex trade industry, which in turn leads to further victimization of violence (Harper, 2006; Kubik et al., 2009; O’Donnell & Wallace, 2011).

The term “othering” was coined in 1985 by Gayatri Spivak to describe the authority of power over women by men, the pathological and moral inferiority of one person to a specific other, and also that knowledge and technology have empirical power over the colonial other (Jensen, 2011). However, this term has since been used in reference to MMIWG2S, in order to create reference for the historical and current negative representation of Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people in current society. Othering has been used to describe the removal of Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people from mainstream society social classes, which casts them out as inferior and vilifies them as “not one of us.” Othering has continued to be the focus of literature analysis and research in regard to the problem of missing and murdered Indigenous

¹ “Coming in . . . is not a declaration or an announcement. Rather, it is an affirmation of interdependent identity: an Aboriginal person who is glbt comes to understand their relationship to and place and value in their own family community, culture, history and present-day world” (A. Wilson, 2008, p. 89).

women and girls in Canada (Beniuk, 2012; Flowers, 2015; Harper, 2006; LaRocque, 2011). There are complex causes to the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada; however, it is clear that Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people have become more vulnerable to becoming missing or murdered within Canada, in large part due to marginalization, othering, racism, and sexism, as well as being victims of violence that has not been addressed. The problem of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people is without a doubt connected to historical colonial effects of violence.

Unfortunately, in addition to these contributing factors, the high number of cases in which police mishandled or improperly investigated cases of MMIWG is staggering (Beniuk, 2012; Carter, 2005; Palmater, 2016). Scholar Jodi Beniuk (2012) stated, “Colonialism is not a simple historical event; it is an ongoing process in Canada, and the police are a key part of its continuation” (p. 90). It is important to note that the ongoing dissatisfaction with police has stemmed from a long history of lack of trust and systemic racism against Indigenous Peoples. The relationship with Indigenous Peoples and police has been broken for centuries, dating back to the introduction of the North West Mounted Police. The North West Mounted Police were introduced in Canada in 1873, initially reporting to have good relations with Indigenous Peoples up to 1874; however, these reports cannot be substantiated, as most of these testimonies come from non-Indigenous accounts (Comack, 2012; Miller, 2000) The North West Mountain Police quickly took to policing and controlling the Indigenous population, as this was an integral part of the colonization and assimilative techniques used to take over the lands and later place Indigenous Peoples onto reserves and forcibly placing their children into residential schools. The negative relationships with police began not in a way to serve and protect but to establish governance over them (Nettelbeck & Smandych, 2010, p. 357). Commissioners from the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry suggested that the memory of the oppression that was enacted on Indigenous Peoples throughout Canadian history by police forces still lingers, and these negative experiences are reinforced by the continuation of today’s broken relationship (Hamilton & Sinclair, 1991).

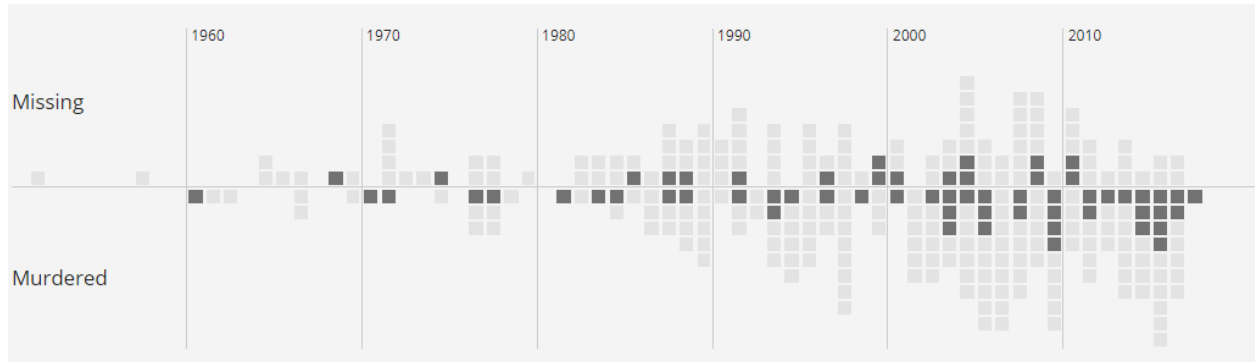
The mistrust of police forces continues to play a large part in the problem of MMIWG2S, as much of the work completed by police forces has left families feeling dissatisfied by the findings. For example, in 2014, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police developed a report that stated Indigenous women are overrepresented in comparison to other missing and murdered

women, and there are nearly 1,200 reported MMIWG in Canada. However, there has been much speculation that the actual number of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada is significantly higher because the numbers continue to rise within reported data (Brennan, 2011; Native Women's Association of Canada, 2010; RCMP, 2014). In addition, the number of unreported cases of disappearances, or otherwise unreported deaths that cannot be deemed a homicide, are not included within the statistical figures of MMIWG in Canada, and data including Two-Spirit individuals have not been reported. Within British Columbia over the past 30 years, a large number of Indigenous women have turned up murdered and gone missing, and the reported numbers by the police of missing women conflict with citizens reports, which suggest the number is over three times higher than that of the documented police numbers (Jiwani & Young, 2006). Police statistics are not adding up, and many cases have gone unsolved. The growing number of MMIWG2S from within Manitoba between 1960s until 2015 that are unresolved cases of MMIWG2S are outlined in Figure 1. Many cases of MMIWG2S have been found to have suspicious circumstances, but the cases were closed due to police mishandling and/or coroners' reports that may have concluded the death was inconclusive. This contributes to the undocumented cases, which have been short of evidence to proceed to a murder investigation ("Missing & Murdered," 2016). This has left families heartbroken and feeling helpless.

Research conducted on the problem of MMIWG has reported that Canada has failed at its obligation of due diligence within the cases of the missing and murdered women and girls in Canada; action must be taken by police and government forces in addressing this problem (Oppal, 2012; Poapst & Sandulak, 2015; Sobko, 2014; "Stolen Sisters," 2004). The police are a significant factor in addressing the problem of MMIWG2S. Although it has been found within the 2019 *National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* that collaboration of multiple systems should be addressed in order to find solutions to the problem of MMIWG2S, the police system is the only system that is federally mandated to protect and serve our women, girls, and Two-Spirit people as well as being the only entity that has the ability to investigate and examine thoroughly these deaths and disappearances. Police systems must be held accountable for their part in addressing this issue.

Figure 1:

The dark grey represents the number of women and girls in Manitoba who have gone missing or been murdered in Manitoba from 1960-2015 which are unresolved.



Source: Missing & Murdered: The Unsolved Cases of Indigenous Women and Girls. (2016) *CBC News* (Case Explorer figure). (<http://www.cbc.ca/missingandmurdered/>)

Introduction

The National Inquiry will continue to focus on what matters most: providing a safe space and enough time for families and survivors to tell their truths. It is these truths that will inform our recommendations to address the widespread systemic violence that Indigenous woman, girls and two-spirited people face, every day in Canada. (Marion Buller, Chief Commissioner National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, National Inquiry 2019)

The problem of MMIWG2S has only more recently garnered significant national media attention within today's society due to the introduction of a national inquiry. The National Inquiry into MMIWG2S in Canada was created in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (2015) *Calls to Action*, which call upon the federal government to act to lead an investigation into the MMIWG2S in Canada to find the causes and remedies for the disproportionate marginalization of Indigenous women and girls. Although there was no specific mention of the disproportional victimization of Two-Spirit people within the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action* released in 2015, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) made efforts to ensure that Two-Spirit people were not left out (National Inquiry, 2018, 2019).

The introduction of the National Inquiry has created space for families of MMIWG2S to tell their stories to help them heal and find solutions to this problem; however, families who have not been involved within the inquiry should have space created for them to also find healing.

There has been much dissatisfaction from families who have chosen not to be involved in the National Inquiry due to its colonial structure, having been designed and administered through the Canadian Government, as well as families being outright ignored by the officials working for the inquiry, which has completely left them out of the inquiry process (Barrera, 2018). There are numerous other reasons why families have not participated in the National Inquiry, such as a lack of support, they were not specifically reached out to or did not have adequate information to participate, as well as not feeling that they were in the right space physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually to participate. The voices of all families affected by this problem should be heard. All families should have a chance to be supported in their healing. To affect positive change for all families of MMIWG2S, they should be given access to a national platform to voice their concerns. This is desperately needed to help solve the problem of MMIWG2S in Canada. Sharing the stories of MMIWG2S as well as utilizing land-based methods of healing and Indigenous ceremony can contribute to current decolonizing approaches. Focusing on these families, this group of people who have not had their voices heard and who are most knowledgeable would help to bring about change.

Recent studies have suggested that the human rights of MMIWG2S must be recognized, and the use of storytelling can be utilized to address the problem (Gunn, 2017; Nelson, 2017). However, without the voices of MMIWG2S to address their human rights, it is apparent that the families will have to come forward to offer their stories and voices to speak for their loved ones. Studies have identified a noticeable need to include their stories because there is clearly a lack of voices of families evident within current literature (Oppal, 2012). The literature clearly showed that the voices of families are an essential requirement to better focus the objectives that will lead to solutions to the complex problem of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people (Native Women's Association of Canada, 2010; Saramo, 2016).

Indigenous women in Canada have struggled throughout many generations to break free from stereotypes, stigmas, and socio-economic problems created by colonization that have contributed to the problem of MMIWG (Clark, 2012; "Stolen Sisters," 2004). The need for change and healing is evident within Canada's current society due to many of these factors, as Indigenous women continue to be systematically oppressed and marginalized. The process of healing through reclamation of traditional knowledge sharing (i.e., storytelling, land-based and ceremonial healing) and rebuilding (i.e., recommendations for change) can be used to continue

the healing and decolonization process. Colonization has created many problems within Canada's society today, including the problem of MMIWG2S. The process of healing and decolonization must be continued to help break the harmful cycle of MMIWG2S in Canada.

Chapter Two: Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this research is to capture the stories of three family members of MMIWG2S in Winnipeg who have *not* been involved with the National Inquiry. At the heart of my work is the theory that the untold stories of the loved ones of MMIWG2S will reveal important information regarding police involvement related to the disappearances or deaths of their loved ones. This research will provide families a space to be heard because their stories have not been told, have not been heard, or they may not have been given the resources or platforms needed to share their stories. In addition, Indigenous land-based methods of healing and ceremony will be engaged throughout this process as a potential method for supporting the healing of the families affected. The intention of this work has been to create a dialog of reclamation and rebuilding through holistic Indigenous methods of healing for individuals who were not involved in the National Inquiry into MMIWG2S. The goal has been to mobilize the stories told and recommendations collected to encourage improving policing action related to MMIWG2S investigations in Winnipeg.

The specific research objectives are:

1. To document, understand, and create dialogue with stories from families of MMIWG2S who have not been involved in the National Inquiry into MMIWG2S in regards to police actions in the cases of their family members' death or disappearance.
2. To collect recommendations that would support policy change from the families of MMIWG2S who have not been involved in the National Inquiry into MMIWG2S, which focus on police action and the investigation of Indigenous women's deaths or disappearances.
3. To support the healing of families of MMIWG2S, who have not been involved in the National Inquiry into MMIWG2S, through holistic Indigenous land-based and ceremonial methods of healing.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

To establish the context of this research, I have surveyed several bodies of research focused on the problem of MMIWG2S within Canada. Specific attention is given to how colonization has created an impact on Indigenous women in the form of marginalization, racism, and oppression, which have attributed to the problem of MMIWG2S, as well as how police forces in situations of violence against Indigenous women, and specifically within the investigations of MMIWG2S, have created dissatisfaction with these conventional justice systems. This literature analysis examines how the factors linked to colonization pose unique challenges to combat the problem of MMIWG2S. The literature pointed to effective uses of decolonized methods of healing as a solution to help address the problem. Research considered within this review is focused on Canada, as the work completed through this research is in the context of Manitoba. The literature surveyed is largely academic in nature and includes studies and reports from government and organizations such as Amnesty International and the National Inquiry into MMIWG2S. In order to create reason and justification for the research and story collection, this literature has been analyzed and the gaps identified.

Colonial Effects

There are many factors attributable to the over representation of MMIWG2S in Canada; however, current literature has pointed to colonialism as the predominant link. Research showed that colonization has created many negative societal impacts on Indigenous peoples, such as racist attitudes that contribute to the marginalization of Indigenous women. These issues contribute to victim blaming, which has often been used to excuse the lack of actions taken in the disappearances and murders of Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people. In addition, the absent and negative media representation of MMIWG2S in Canada perpetuates stereotypes and further strengthens marginalization. These issues need to be addressed in order to find solutions to the problem of MMIWG2S. Changing current narratives through forms of storytelling by the victims' loved ones can be used as a solution to help address these issues.

The colonial legacy in Canada has created many negative impacts that are faced by Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people. In fact, academics such as Midolo (2018) and Smiley (2016) contended that the colonial legacy of oppression and marginalization of Indigenous women stems all the way back to first contact and the use of dehumanization,

patriarchy, and Eurocentric ideologies as tools that were used to devalue Indigenous women and girls. The traditional roles of Indigenous women were at one time, within the context of a healthy Indigenous community before the impacts of colonialism, respected and spiritually sacred. Violence against women and the problem of MMIWG2S can be attributed to the many negative impacts of colonization and marginalization that are still felt by Indigenous Peoples today, ultimately through the process of oppression and othering of Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people. Two-Spirit academic Alex Wilson (2018) asserted in their article “Skirting the Issues” in the book *Keetsahnak*, that heteropatriarchy and gender binaries have also been tools utilized to create a divide by othering Two-Spirit people within current literature. A non-Indigenous Winnipeg police officer who wrote his PhD on the topic of Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people working within the sex trade and both the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s (2015) 94 Calls to Action and the National Inquiry into MMIWG2S found that the problem of MMIWG2S is an ongoing genocide committed by Canada and is predominantly linked to colonialism (Christmas, 2017). The connection to the impacts of colonialism has created not only the problem of MMIWG2S but also other effects and related issues that contribute to the problem gaining momentum, rather than being addressed by those in positions to make positive improvements.

Previous studies conducted have found that there are many links to racist attitudes against Indigenous Peoples within Canadian government systems that are meant to protect Indigenous women; rather, these state-run bodies have contributed to the marginalization of Indigenous women, furthering the problem of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people in Canada (Beniuk, 2012; Gilchrist, 2010; Palmater, 2016; “Stolen Sisters,” 2004). Indigenous women have continued to be marginalized and have been rejected within current society as the “other,” and this term can be found in many instances in current literature. Indigenous women have become the “racialized and sexualized other” in colonial society, which explains why many victims have been blamed for their own disappearances and murders, as Indigenous women are continually blamed for situating themselves within risky circumstances that ultimately lead to their disappearances and murders (Beniuk, 2012; Clark, 2012). Victim blaming places the blame solely on the victim, supplying officials with the perfect scapegoat to shift the blame, rather than take accountability within their own actions or lack of action following a disappearance or murder. The dominant narrative created by colonialism is that

Indigenous women and girls are vulnerable to experience violence, and the burden is placed on their backs to protect themselves by changing their own risky behaviours and to find their own solutions, rather than addressing the structural and ideological conditions that have created racism, sexism, marginalization and oppression of Indigenous women in cases of MMIWG2S.

The Amnesty International report, “Stolen Sisters” (2004) as well as the National Inquiry into MMIWG2S (2019) found that police believe that the lifestyles of Indigenous women working within prostitution or having addictions issues are the important factors in which women become vulnerable and are thus victims of violence or go missing, rather than the issues of structural racism or sexism. This argument has been furthered throughout Flowers’s (2015), Gilchrist’s (2010), and Palmater’s (2016) research stating Indigenous women are wrongly blamed for their own disappearances and murders. Racist attitudes, oppression, and the very apparent marginalization of Indigenous women in Canada have furthered the problem of MMIWG2S within Canada and only work to impede any help in addressing this issue by police forces or government officials within places of power to create positive change.

Awareness and fact-based information related to the problem of MMIWG2S has been further reduced by negative and absent media coverage. Research conducted has shown that Indigenous women who have gone missing or been murdered have been disproportionately absent from television news reports in comparison to non-Indigenous women (Gilchrist, 2010; Jiwani, 2009). Media coverage is largely lacking. When coverage was given to Indigenous women, the reports were significantly shorter, and the victims were discredited or misrepresented with negative stereotypes of Indigenous Peoples, in comparison to that of non-Indigenous women suffering the same fate (Jiwani, 2009; Palmater, 2016; Tucker, 2016). This lack of factual representation and the stereotyping damage the potential for gaining support and awareness of the problem, as it furthers the negative representation and stereotypes of Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people, which follows the colonial narratives. This often creates a very damaging, negative ideology within society that contributes to the victim-blaming mentality and narratives of those who are in positions of power in government bodies who should be helping to find solutions.

In response to the negative and absent representation of MMIWG2S, Gilchrist’s (2010) research called attention to 12 instances where reporters highlighted resistance to the negative media representation in the form of memorials, rallies, and vigils for the victims, which also

strengthened Menke's (2019) argument that the use of memorials, rallies and vigils are effective in spreading positive awareness and challenging the current rhetoric. These forms of storytelling capture loved ones' messages through representations using poster boards and the melodic chants for justice for each of the individual victims during these rallies, memorials, and vigils. Gilchrist and Menke agreed that individuals and advocates have taken up the task of promoting awareness of the issue of MMIWG2S in response to the negative media representation of the victims. The voices of family members of MMIWG2S have been surprisingly absent from media coverage, which unfortunately only works to strengthen the negative representation of Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people within media and the absent media coverage. Although there has been a recent narrative shift, presumably due to the tireless work of families and advocates, there is a ton of work still left to bring these voices to a higher level.

Despite the negative media representation or lack thereof in news coverage on MMIWG2S, in comparison, advocates continue to create widespread support with the use of social media, activism, art, and word-of-mouth throughout Canada. This has created positive widespread exposure with projects such as: (a) *Walking with Our Sisters* (2021), an art and beading project by Christine Belcourt, that highlights the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada with the use of an art installation of beadwork moccasin vamps; (b) the movie *Finding Dawn* shot by Christine Welsh (2006), a documentary filmmaker who shares the stories of families and their loved ones in remembrance, while also showing the many barriers faced by them in search of their missing loved ones; and (c) the *REDress Project* (Black, 2019) that has come to be known widely as a powerful way for raising awareness of MMIWG2S, by hanging red dresses to represent the loss of Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people. Awareness has also been furthered through the academic literature brought forth which speaks to these important projects by such researchers as S. G. Anderson (2016) and Hargreaves (2015). These examples all focus on the families of MMIWG2S to further outline the historical and societal oppressions that they have faced, which ultimately contributes to the continuing problem of MMIWG2S but also points to the method of storytelling by families affected as a solution that has created positive changes and impacts. Among many other art, media, and visual storytelling projects that bring attention to the issue of MMIWG2S, these projects are prime examples of approaches to changing the negative narratives of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit peoples' deaths or disappearances, specifically from the view of the loved

ones who have been impacted. The storytelling can be viewed through the vivid and sometimes haunting impressions created by the victims' loved ones.

The reviewed literature pointed to the need to disperse the negative representation of MMIWG2S, while highlighting the obvious marginalization and misrepresentation of Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people in Canada due to colonial impacts, which contributes to the problem of MMIWG2S. It also brings attention to the impact of victim blaming that marginalization has caused. This also affects policing action as well as the apparent negative disproportionate treatment in comparison to that of non-Indigenous women. Advocates have begun creating positive dialogue with the use of different forms of storytelling to change current narratives and further amplify the voices of families to help address this issue. The literature highlighted the need for the integration of these voices as well as showcasing their effectiveness in combating the negative representation of Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people in the media and throughout current society.

Systemic Links to the Problem

The enduring problem of MMIWG2S is highly linked to systemic issues, which was noted through the analysis of colonial effects and how they negatively impact societal views. This literature specifically explored and emphasized how police action is highly under question in regard to MMIWG2S as well as the obvious dissatisfaction with the conventional justice systems that have been utilized in efforts to combat the problem. Police forces should be the subject of interest when finding solutions to the problem of MMIWG2S, as they comprise the only system created that is meant to serve and protect our communities as well as mandated and able to investigate the deaths and disappearances of Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people. The use of recommendations for change from families is identified as a solution to help improve the actions of police in the cases of missing or murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit peoples' deaths or disappearances.

Colonial effects have created a broken relationship with Indigenous peoples in regard to policing systems, which in turn negatively impacts addressing the problem of MMIWG2S. Several research studies have argued that federal, provincial, and territorial justice systems discriminate against Indigenous women based on their race, class, and gender and that police

forces do not protect these women from violence and tend to disregard occurrences when reported (Bychutsky, 2017; Harper, 2006; Palmater, 2016).

Racist, sexist, and violent police behavior towards Indigenous women and girls creates many ripple effects in society that make the occurrence of murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls exponentially worse. When the police fail to properly investigate the murder of Indigenous women or fail to investigate missing Indigenous girls and Two-Spirit people, through their example, they help create a society that devalues Indigenous women and send clear signals that others in society can abuse them with relative impunity. (Palmater, 2016, p. 283)

Past state interventions and lack of police action have prevented Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people from reporting violence due to the negative experiences and distrust of police, justice, and child welfare systems, which furthers the acknowledgement that colonial policies and both historical and current state interventions are directly linked to the problem of MMIWG2S (Cao, 2014; Clark, 2012; Palmater, 2016). Sorouja Moll (2016) asserted that there is a direct correlation between colonial systems (RCMP) and the problem of MMIWG2S, yet they continue to be in charge of analysis, data collection, and dissemination, which creates a conflict of interest to their accountability, further perpetuating a structured pattern of oppression. Bychutsky (2017) and Carter (2005) agreed that the problem of MMIWG2S in Canada is directly connected to the negative attitudes of the justice system, police, and government, as there is a lack of action taken in regard to the problem of MMIWG2S in Canada. These findings further validate the arguments within the last section that stated the negative attitudes and stereotypes of Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people hinder the support victims receive within society and negatively impact the actions of officials who are in positions to help combat the problem.

Previous research studies have shown there is much dissatisfaction with the conventional justice systems that are meant to protect women from violence. Families are upset with the lack of police initiative and governing policies in relation to their loved ones' investigations and protection from violence, as well as sex trade workers not feeling protected by police services, which may contribute to disappearances and murders (Clark, 2012; Krüsi et al., 2016). Palmater's (2016) research furthered this argument by suggesting a list of 11 recommendations that outline the overall dissatisfactions with police and government policy, as well as the state, which focused on addressing racism, oppression, and marginalization of Indigenous women in Canada by these forces, which is further strengthened by the calls to justice with the National

Inquiry's (2019) final report. Razack (2016) and Juliat et al. (2017) agreed that the state justice system should be held accountable for the problem of MMIWG2S. They also suggested that the recommendations of family members would help to conduct a successful inquiry into the disappearances and murders of Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people, despite the fact that neither source includes the recommendations of families. More specifically, the National Inquiry identified 11 calls to justice which specifically target policing (2019). These factors have further shown the much-needed work that needs to be done to create partnerships within justice systems so as to work with Indigenous Peoples, rather than against them. Focusing on creating positive changes by building stronger relationships with police forces, rather than continuing the negative experiences that Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people have faced throughout history within Canada, should be a top priority in addressing MMIWG2S.

To mitigate the historic and current broken relationships with policing and judicial bodies, the voices of families should be consulted to offer their recommendations in order to address this issue. It is unfortunate that past studies have omitted the voices and recommendations of family members of MMIWG (Beniuk, 2012; Carter, 2005; Clark, 2012). The voices of family members have more recently begun to be integrated into research studies, and it has become quite evident that these voices will inform not only society concerning education and awareness of the problem of MMIWG2S, but their voices can also be used to address the negative stereotypes and mis-representation of Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people. With any luck, this may ultimately create much needed changes to the negative narratives that continue to be perpetuated, in turn positively impacting the relationships with policing and judicial bodies. In the British Columbia Missing Women Commission of Inquiry (2012) report, conducted in response to the Robert Pickton murders, family members were included in an exhaustive list of recommendations that did not look solely at missing and murdered women but a wide range of colonial impacts faced by Indigenous people within Canada. However, earlier research conducted prior to the final release of this report showed that the recommendations were not met within the actual proceedings of the inquiry conducted, and it is suggested that it ultimately failed because the recommendations of families were withheld (Bennet, 2013; Oppal, 2012). In response to the outlined research, the National Inquiry into MMIWG2S, which conducted its work over more than three years, used the recommendations made by the families of MMIWG2S as its focus. Their report, "*Reclaiming Power and Place*"

(National Inquiry, 2019) exhaustively explored the stories of over 2,000 Canadians who shared their stories of their loved one's death and disappearances and their recommendations for change in regard to MMIWG2S.

This literature highlights the changes that need to be made with police and investigations of MMIWG2S as well as emphasizing the overall dissatisfaction that families have with these conventional justice systems. The voices of families have been found to be effective in helping to improve awareness and in changing the negative representation of MMIWG2S. It has been suggested that this approach may be helpful in creating positive changes in regard to police action in the cases of MMIWG2S. In the past, individual family voices were left out of making recommendations to help address the overall dissatisfaction concerning racism by police. Only recently has the inclusion of families' voices been recognized as a highly effective tool.

Decolonized Methods of Healing

The literature reviewed suggested many different methods of decolonization, such as building relationships and alliances, relaying traditional Indigenous knowledge, land-based cultural practices and ceremony, placing emphasis on further work in support and alignment of current campaigns and awareness to this important issue, as well as paying attention to important recommendations and storytelling of families of MMIWG2S. The use of decolonized methods as a source of healing has been shown to be effective in order to mitigate the impacts of trauma, pain, suffering, and grief attributed to the deaths and disappearances of loved ones, namely in work involved around MMIWG2S.

Decolonization is a complex and intricate process that only recently has been the focus of efforts in order to begin to address and combat the problem of MMIWG2S. Flowers (2015) suggested that decolonization can be furthered by Indigenous Peoples who refuse to forgive the colonial atrocities that have been imposed on them, which will ultimately disempower the colonial state and take back collective powers, thus strengthening the unity of Indigenous peoples. This is also one of the focuses of the National Inquiry (2019), which was conducted for and with Indigenous People (Flowers, 2015; National Inquiry, 2018, 2019). In comparison, further methods of decolonization that have been uncovered within current literature is the production of art, relaying traditional Indigenous knowledge and cultural connections, as well as resistance, advocating and creating awareness of the problem of MMIWG2S to empower

individuals with the means to act to combat this problem on a holistic level and give voices to Indigenous women (Clark, 2012; Moll, 2016). These studies showed that the intention within these art installations, activism, and awareness efforts are approached not only through a decolonial approach but also through the actions of ceremony and spirit. The National Inquiry (2019) conducted over a 3-year period fully integrated the use of traditional methods, Indigenous ways of knowing, ceremony, and appropriate acts of culture, depending on the territory in which they were conducting their work. These decolonized methods used to impact individuals healing have been the focus of many research studies that have been found to be effective in creating healing (Cooper & Driedger, 2019; McCabe, 2008). The use of decolonial methods has been more effective in addressing the impacts of colonialism with Indigenous People and ultimately facilitating healing, rather than those of the traditional Western methods of healing utilized with Western medicines (Greenwood et al., 2015).

Healing is a complex and ongoing process. It can be hard to find the appropriate solutions for colonial trauma, especially in relation to the problem of MMIWG2S. In exploring the complex nature of healing within an Indigenous context, the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Dussault & Erasmus, 1996) defined healing as:

Practices designed to promote mental, physical, and spiritual well-being that are based on beliefs which go back to the time before the spread of Western 'scientific' biomedicine. When Indigenous peoples in Canada talk about traditional healing, they include a wide range of activities, from physical cures using herbal medicines and other remedies, to the promotion of psychological and spiritual well-being using ceremony, counselling and the accumulated wisdom of Elders. (p. 348)

Indigenous ways of knowing and understanding the activities that we have been utilizing to heal are much more intricate and encompassing of holistic health than those of Western sciences. The Western sciences value the mental and physical health of individuals; however, the emotional and spiritual aspects are often neglected. Within a recent study conducted in 2020 on Indigenous methods of healing, it was found that the introduction and use of arts and expressions of creativity, ceremonies, games, Indigenous-based cultural teachings, circles, land-based activities, feasts, and one-on-one support were all forms of effective methods to improve healing, in response to the impacts of colonialism (Yu et al., 2020). Hall et al. (2020) strengthened these arguments by examining the effects of land-based methods of healing on Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people. Their study found that the integration and implementation of land-based

healing can positively impact the effects of violence against women and in turn, the problem of MMIWG2S. Further to this, a study completed on land-based methods of healing in New Brunswick found that spirituality is a central aspect, which is incorporated through the relaying of traditional knowledges by Elders, Knowledge Keepers, prayers, storytelling, ceremony, and language (Hickey et al., 2020). The positive impacts of land-based activities have been utilized as a method to create healing within Indigenous culture since time immemorial, as it is not only utilized as a tool but is an integral aspect of Indigenous culture and identity. Studies on the integration of land-based learning within education point to the need for regeneration of culture and identity through the use of the land, ultimately creating healing for Indigenous peoples (Wildcat et al., 2014). To address systemic issues such as MMIWG2S, this research points to the use of land-based healing.

Current research has suggested that the act of storytelling is an act of decolonization that should be utilized to further strengthen the autonomy and self-determination of Indigenous women in Canada who have been silenced by systematic oppression throughout history (Hargreaves, 2015; Letendre, 2016; National Inquiry, 2018). Storytelling can be utilized to address systemic racism, misrepresentation, and stereotypes, as well as giving voices to address the dissatisfaction with conventional justice systems; however, it has also been utilized as a method of healing. Storytelling is not only an integral part of Indigenous culture, ways of knowing, and a way of relaying traditional knowledge, but storytelling has been the focus of recent studies as a method of healing in regards to MMIWG2S (Bernard, 2018; National Inquiry, 2019; Rowat, 2019; Savares, 2017). The use of storytelling is highly linked to ceremony and spirit, as Elders within ceremony utilize storytelling and oral tradition to relay their important messages. The integration of ceremony has been found to be effective in addressing the issues created by colonialism, namely violence against women and the problem of MMIWG2S. Ceremony and spirit has been an intricate act of resistance and method of education and awareness efforts used to inform people of the problem of MMIWG2S. These efforts have not gone unnoticed and there has been a surge of research that points to the effectiveness of ceremony and spiritual practices in healing Indigenous peoples from the impacts of colonialism and the impacts of traumas that are a result of these factors.

The use of spirit and ceremony, although challenging to quantify within the parameters of Western science, was used by the National Inquiry (2019) throughout the 3-year process of story

collection, the data analysis and dissemination, and delivery of the report. Although the creation of the report flowed through the colonial government, the individuals who delivered and worked on the project alongside the families who shared their stories were Indigenous. They put forth a document that conveyed in the best way possible, the necessity of ceremony and spirit, even within the limitations set by the Canadian government.

Luoma (2021) dissected the national inquiry in his research which uncovers what he calls, the cultural harm created by colonialism. Luoma points towards the need for holistic and decolonized approaches to heal Indigenous peoples, such as the methods utilized by the inquiry Research conducted by Judy Iseke (2013), who gathered Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, storytellers, educators, and historians to relay their knowledge, experience, and spiritual beliefs, showed how integral the aspects of culture, ceremony and spirituality are to community health and wellbeing. Lastly, when looking at research conveyed in “Mind, Body, Emotions, and Spirit: Reaching to the Ancestors for Healing,” McCabe (2008) explored how the interrelatedness and connection of mind, body, and spirit are the conduits of healing through the use of ceremony and cultural practices, specifically from an Indigenous perspective.

The use of decolonized methods of healing is not a one-size-fits-all method. As the research has suggested, these methods can be utilized in conjunction with each other, as they are interconnected. The teachings of traditional knowledge with the use of storytelling, ceremony, and spirit conducted on the land, through different ways of thinking, seeing, being, doing, and understanding, are integrally connected and work together in an interwoven and symbiotic relationship. These methods work to help facilitate healing for Indigenous Peoples who have been impacted by colonial effects, such as trauma and grief related to the problem of MMIWG2S.

Summary of Literature Review

In summary, the literature reviewed looks critically at the impacts of colonization on Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people, which has created many negative impacts including racism, othering, and marginalization, ultimately contributing to the issue of MMIWG2S. The literature correspondingly showed how these issues are systemically linked to the lack of representation, negative misrepresentation, and stereotyping of Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people within the media that contribute to the problem of victimizing and

blaming the victims, ultimately leading to a lack of policing response and the overall dissatisfaction with police and government systems. The literature demonstrated the need for changes with regard to police investigations of MMIWG2 and suggested the remedy to address these issues may come in the form of decolonized methods of healing and incorporating the voices and recommendations made by families of MMIWG2S. The literature explored further emphasized the use of potential decolonizing strategies in the form of Traditional knowledge and the use of storytelling and holistic methods of land-based and ceremonial healing and spirit. The gap found throughout the literature reviewed was namely a lack of family voices who were not included within the National Inquiry into MMIWG2S and other related efforts to address the problem of MMIWG2S. Lastly, the issue of policing itself has been insufficiently researched nor has it been independently investigated throughout different data forms and within academia. Many important details are still to be heard and legitimized within recorded police data. This was a noted gap throughout this research.

My research intends to address this gap by providing space for and recording stories of families of MMIWG2S who have not been involved in the National Inquiry, to not only better understand their stories but also, through the use of decolonial methods of healing, to create positive dialogue in memorial of their loved ones who have gone missing or been murdered. The intent of this research was to mobilize family voices to hopefully create a narrative that will contribute to solidarity and awareness and work towards alleviating the negative representation and marginalization of MMIWG2S. As well, this research aims to contribute to the academic content that focuses on policing. The recommendations made by the families for changes will be utilized to address the dissatisfaction of conventional systems of justice.

Chapter Four: Methods

This section looks closely at the methods and methodologies, including the conceptual framework. Each piece was intentionally selected and carefully crafted in order to be interwoven together to carry out this work.

Research Design/Methodology

A challenge to completing this research was working within the academic setting as an Indigenous researcher, holding lived experience within the community of family members of MMIWG2S, and trying to find the appropriate methods and strategies to “fit” within and alongside the traditional legitimate sciences of the Western context. This study was wholeheartedly guided and led through spirit and ceremony. However, to fulfil the requirements within an academic setting, the methods were selected to create an interwoven balance, in order to complete this work in a good way, to the best of my ability, within the parameters of the Western sciences, while incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing, seeing, being, thinking, and doing.

A (Ininíw) Cree Indigenous Research Paradigm was utilized because my research is focused and structured through the lens of myself as an inside researcher and as someone who is impacted by this problem. I have selected this paradigm as an Ininíw Iskwèw (Cree Woman). I am strongly connected to and involved within my cultural and traditional practices and wish to integrate these ways of knowing, knowledge, worldview, and protocols into my research. However, the Western qualitative design inquiry approach was also utilized and interwoven with Indigenous storytelling, in the form of narrative research.

Narrative research studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives. This information is often retold or re-storied by the researcher into a narrative chronology. Often, in the end, the narrative combines views from the participant’s life with those of the researcher’s life in collaborative narrative. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, as cited in Creswell, 2013, pp. 13–14)

This strategy was utilized, as the study collected and documents the stories of families of MMIWG2S, who have been affected by this problem, to better understand the issues faced by them. As this research has been conducted within a Western academic setting at the University of Winnipeg, it was appropriate to acknowledge the use of Western academic methods used throughout this work as well as how this design was utilized in collaboration with Indigenous research methods to successfully balance both forms and interweave them to work together. Indigenous research methodologies were used in the form of storytelling and land-based and

ceremonial methods of healing, as the objective of this work was to record the stories of families in order to deconstruct past narratives and reconstruct healing stories that resist colonial violence, which essentially furthers decolonization processes: “destroying what has wrongly been written—for instance ... models that pathologized the colonized Other—and retelling the stories of the past and envisioning the future” (Chilisia, 2012, p. 17).

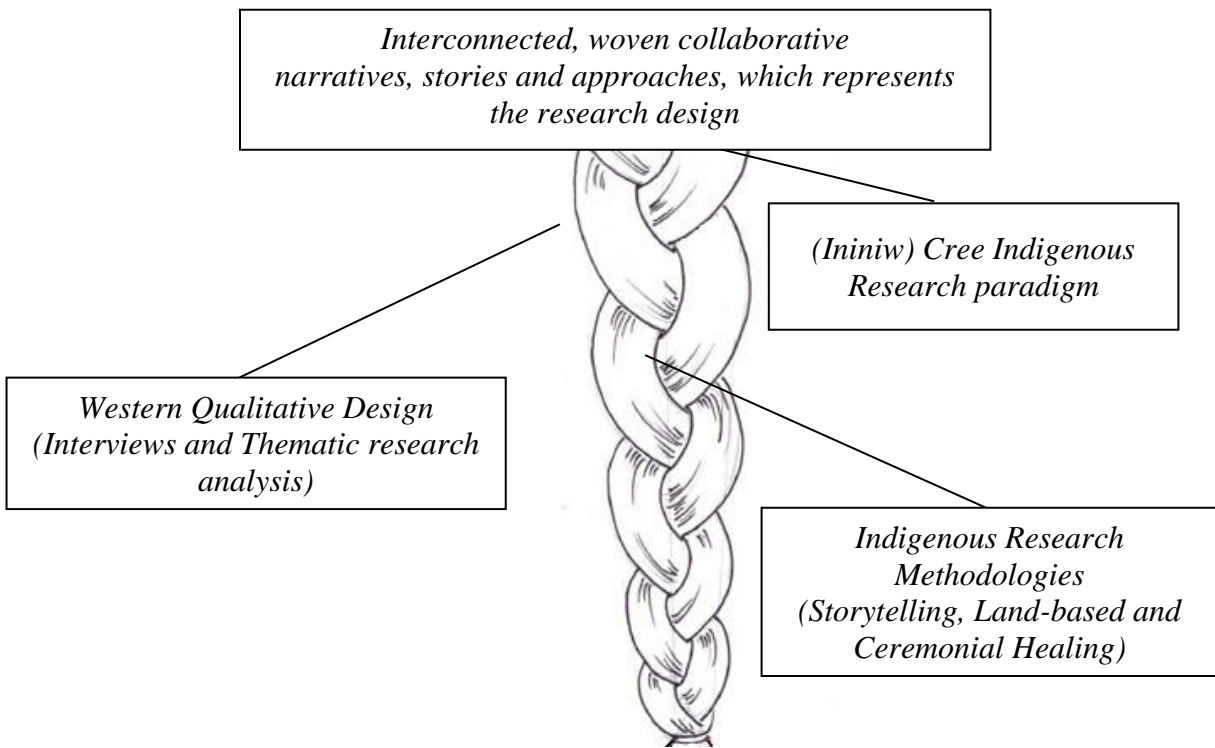
The process of recovery and discovery is facilitated through this strategy and was supported through the process of the stories told of the victims by their family members to deconstruct negative representations of their loved ones, in order to reconstruct this narrative to rehumanize the women, girls, and Two-Spirit people who have been othered. The research analyzed within the literature reviewed suggested that families who have not been involved within the National Inquiry have not had their voices heard, and this research aims to help support the reconstruction of current negative representations and narratives of MMIWG2S, to better understand the problem and generate recommendations for change, as well as create a stronger sense of healing for each of the individuals involved in this work. Stories were collected from families of MMIWG2S who have not been involved within the national inquiry as well as their recommendations for changes in regard to policing action for investigations of MMIWG2S. These recommendations were collected through an inclusive Indigenous Sharing Circle process, in which all of the participants were invited to come together to share their recommendations depending on their individual experiences and stories. The integration of both Indigenous and Western aspects of design and methods were chosen to promote a balanced overall structure of research to pull together both aspects in alignment with the use of an Indigenous paradigm. This process is noted within the conceptual framework presented in Figure 2, in which the interwovenness of IRP, qualitative research design, and decolonizing methodologies of relational ontology, epistemology, and axiology relationship of the researcher and the participants’ storytelling are outlined.

I have been gifted the teaching of the braid, which symbolizes the interconnectedness and strengthening of the extension of one’s self with their spiritual power and the importance of respecting and caring for it. I utilize the braid as a conceptual framework to represent the interconnectedness and strengthening of my research that embodies Traditional Knowledge (i.e., storytelling), land-based and ceremonial methods of healing, and the IRP that reflects the relationship that should be respected and cared for, much like the teaching of the braid. Although

this concept was conceptualized by me through my own traditional knowledge, I found through research that recently, it has mostly been used within the work of others. Specifically, scholar John Borrows, who specializes in Indigenous law practices, which utilizes the braid to conceptualize the braiding of Indigenous practices and Western concepts of law in his book entitled *Braiding Legal Orders* (Borrows et al., 2019).

Figure 2:

Conceptual framework representing the braided interwovenness of Indigenous paradigm, Western Qualitative design Approach and Indigenous Research Methodologies, that embody the strength and interconnectedness of the collaboration of stories and approaches.



Participant Selection

Research partners/participants were selected through a community call for participants using the recruitment poster sent out by various community organizations within Winnipeg (see Appendix A). I received a varied response to my call and spoke at length by telephone with potential participants. It is important to note that during the summer of 2020 when this research

took place, social distancing restrictions were put in effect due to the global pandemic caused by Covid-19. As this demographic is a particularly vulnerable population, each individual was thoroughly interviewed to assess their readiness to participate within this study. Telephone conversations were only utilized due to the ongoing Covid-19 world pandemic, in which social distancing was a top priority and safety measure. Although this method of contact was definitely not preferable, in relation to honouring Indigenous protocols and practices, in which tobacco was to be offered and shared to honour the participants' agreement to be involved, my conversations were welcomed and warmly received by interested individuals. A teaching that has been passed on to me is that tobacco is one of the four sacred medicines generally used as a gift or offering. Tobacco is commonly offered from the person asking for something of the other, in order for both people to consent to move forward in a partnership or agreement in a good way. Tobacco is also used as an offering in forms such as when something is taken from the land, such as medicine or the sacrifice of an animal's life, tobacco is placed as an offering for the "animal's Grandfather spirit" as a thank you (Stonechild, 2020). This is a form of agreement and thank you from both consenting sides of the agreement. In the event that this transaction was unable to take place (due to the impacts of Covid-19), each potential participant was described in detail about the holistic methods of healing that were to be integrated within the project to better support their distinct needs, as well as Indigenous ways of knowing protocols that would be utilized. Through conversations with the participants, it was found that there is a significant group of individuals who have not had their voices heard by the National Inquiry and would be open to being potential participants.

Three individuals were selected by their availability to participate throughout the summer and their readiness to share their stories of their loved ones. All genders were considered as participants (i.e., male, female, Two-Spirit, non-binary), as the goal was to gain a full perspective of how they individually and collectively dealt with issues surrounding their loved one's disappearance or murder. I felt that limiting to only one gender would hinder my objective of gaining a well-rounded perspective, and the utilization of all recognized genders would exemplify the role of responsibility of all human beings in addressing this problem through the collective. It was my intention to include all genders to bring about a balance within the stories and perspectives that were shared. I specifically approached a Two-Spirit individual I had in mind to be involved in this work; however, due to the impacts of Covid-19 and other limitations

felt by that individual, they were unable to participate. It was extremely important that all genders were included within the call; however, only cis male and cis female participants came forward to be involved in this research. Each participant was given both the participant consent form (see Appendix B) to view and sign at our first meeting, as well as the list of questions that would be asked over the course of their time to share (see Appendix C). As Indigenous protocols of offering tobacco could not be shared in initial telephone contact due to Covid-19, honorary gifts of a medicine bundle were shared with each of the participants to close their storytelling.

Data Collection

My data collection procedures utilized Western data recording procedures as outlined within Creswell's (2013) book, *Research Design*. Interview protocols were used in partnership with observational protocols, as they aligned within my qualitative design method (pp. 193–194). Additionally, Indigenous research methods were utilized in the form of storytelling by the participants. My qualitative interviews were conducted face-to-face with participants, and additional contact was made through the telephone and via email. Each interview was unstructured and open ended, as the research focused on the participants sharing their stories, views, and opinions with me. A Sharing Circle was also held with the collective participation of two of the participants to address their recommendations. Additionally one of the participants was able to relay some of their recommendations during the interview/story collection portion of this research, as they were unable to participate during the Sharing Circle portion of this research. Furthermore, my personal logbook was utilized that focused on notes from the interviews and observations of participants.

To address the research objective—to document, understand, and create a dialogue of stories from families of MMIWG2S who have not been involved within the National Inquiry regarding police action in the cases of their family members' death or disappearance, I conducted qualitative face-to-face interviews. These interviews were semi-structured in nature with each individual participant, in order to document their stories and experiences with regard to their loved one's disappearance or murder. I asked a limited number of guiding questions that opened discussion about their experiences with the police during the investigations into the disappearances or murders of their loved ones. The interviews were open-ended to provide the participants the opportunity to focus on their stories, views, and opinions. In addition, I also

collected and analyzed qualitative documents, including newspaper articles and videos that were shared with me by the participants that are related to the deaths or disappearances of the participants' loved one. I utilized these sources of information to give a clear and thorough understanding of the circumstances surrounding their stories of their loved one's disappearances or murders and used them in correlation with their stories of police actions in the investigations of their loved ones. Notes were taken throughout this process, and the interviews were audio recorded with permission of the participants and later transcribed.

To address the research objective through holistic Indigenous land-based and ceremonial methods of healing, I conducted my research interviews outdoors on the land, in connection with Mother Earth. My intent was to also include participants within an Indigenous sweat lodge ceremony; however, due to the impacts of the global pandemic created by Covid-19, this was, unfortunately, an unviable option. A sweat lodge is a ceremonial activity used for a variety of things such as praying, singing, learning, or healing. Stonechild (2016) described the lodge as symbolizing "the womb of Mother Earth and is for spiritual cleansing and regeneration. In the lodge, while there is singing and praying, water is poured over glowing hot rocks, producing cleansing steam" (pp. 72–73). Including this method was very important to me as a method of healing, as I have found much healing through this way of life. However, in mitigating the limitations created by Covid-19, I utilized my own understandings and knowing through ceremony to introduce a sacred fire and feast for the families in place of a sweat lodge. I offered a plate of food and tobacco, in place of a sweat lodge ceremony, to open and close the research data collection portion in a good way. This sacred fire was gifted to me through the actions I took before the story collection portion of this study, in which I offered tobacco to seek guidance from spirit in how I should approach the research during the pandemic. Although the participants were not physically in attendance during this ceremony in order to practice health safety and social distancing practices, it is my understanding, as I have previously been taught, that spirit is always connected through ceremony.

It was not unexpected that each participant I built relationships with had previous knowledge and experience being involved within different ceremonies and traditional Indigenous practices before beginning this study. I was fortunate that all participants were eager to share their understandings and knowledge as well as offer their insights to this study. The interviews were taken individually over the course of one day each, with each individual interview

beginning with a traditional smudging ceremony, where we burned sage to cleanse our energies and bodies. The first and last interviews were conducted without the support of an Elder due to our discussions and the confidence in both myself and the participants' knowledge, readiness, and ability to participate without supports, as well as the inability of the Elder to participate on those particular days due to illness.

Within the first interview, I and the participant picked medicine and Saskatoon berries in addition to the story collection portion of the study. The second and last interviews were conducted on the land, but no medicine was collected, as medicine teachings were relayed and shared throughout the process by the Elder, me, and the participants. The story collection phase provided the research participants the opportunity to learn, share, and further engage with teachings but also find land-based healing, as they had the opportunity not only to offer their stories and teachings but to also connect with mother earth and Indigenous land-based holistic ways of healing. The intention of this research was to have participants take part in Indigenous ceremony and land-based methods of healing that would address their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual healing needs. It is my hope that these methods of healing will continue to be utilized by the participants and strengthen their healing journey and hopefully be shared with others.

To address the research objective, to gain recommendations regarding police action from the families of MMIWG who have not been involved within the National Inquiry into MMIWG, I conducted an Indigenous-based Sharing Circle with two of the participants initially interviewed to allow for the sharing of knowledge to identify their recommendations for positive changes in concerning policing action in investigations of MMIWG2S. The Sharing Circle or talking circle, as outlined in Chilisia's (2012) book *Indigenous Research Methodologies*, worked in alignment with respecting each participant's time to share uninterrupted and equally to each other, to share their ideas respectfully with compassion and love for one another. Due to scheduling conflicts, one of the participants was unable to commit their time to participate with the Sharing Circle portion of the study, so the two remaining participants sat in the Sharing Circle with me to share their recommendations.

This aspect of the research was conducted in space held for us by Ndinawemaaganag Endaawaad Inc., which graciously provided us a safe and welcoming space for participants to share and support each other in making their recommendations. Ndinawemaaganag Endaawaad

Inc. is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to helping at-risk youth in Winnipeg's north end and inner city. Ndinawe provides safety, connection, and support for vulnerable youth. Their programs target harm reduction, crisis intervention, education, and stabilization for young people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness, sexual exploitation, family conflict, placement breakdown, and mental health crises, as well as building a sense of connection and belonging for youth at risk to strengthen the youth voice within their community. Providing innovative and culturally informed programs to under-served communities is part of a positive path towards a better future for Winnipeg's Indigenous and at-risk youth.

We opened the Sharing Circle with a traditional smudge to cleanse our energy and the space, as well as a prayer that was guided by one of the participants, in order to move forward in making recommendations in a good way. We were provided feast berries that were prayed for, and a spirit dish was set aside to put into the sacred fire for the participants and loved ones. I feel that sharing of recommendations and aspects of their stories with others will help to address my objective to provide a healing space for families affected by the problem of MMIWG2S by providing a space to hold their stories, as well as furthering decolonization, through the practice of ceremony, specifically the sacred fire conducted after recommendations were shared.

Throughout the collection of stories, I utilized Shawn Wilson's (2008) suggestion within his book *Research is Ceremony*. He stated,

The purpose of any ceremony is to build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between our cosmos and us. The research that we do as Indigenous peoples is a ceremony that allows us a raised level of consciousness and insight into our world. Through going forward together with open minds and good hearts we have uncovered the nature of this ceremony. (p. 137)

I feel that this outlook embodies the research conducted and utilized within the building of relationships with the participants throughout the collection of experiences and stories, as well as the very intentional and delicate integration of Indigenous ways of knowing ceremonies, as I have come to understand them and incorporated them within this study. Further, I conducted "insider research" since I am a part of the researched community who has been affected by the problem of MMIWG2S. This research was conducted to (a) make a collective contribution to this community, (b) facilitate my own well-being that is the goal of living a good life, and (c) to contribute to positive changes for the next generations (Absolon, 2011).

An integral and important part of this study was to include myself in participating in ceremony and integrating the land-based methods of healing in collaboration with my research participants, to continue the relationship building and partnerships with my participants. Due to the impacts of Covid-19 and the global pandemic, I utilized the teachings and ceremonies that I have been gratefully gifted throughout my life to incorporate the ceremony and the land-based learning, sharing, and healing that took place during the recording of the participants' stories and through the duration of this study. I am grateful to have the support of the Elder Paul Guimond and Ndinawemaaganag Endaawaad Inc., who offered their space and support to this research.

Data Analysis

I used a thematic data analysis approach to familiarize myself with the data, which ultimately helped me to better understand the data. I utilized a re-coding process to see if the results were the same and therefore dependable. I interpreted my research findings to understand what was learned through the collection and the analysis of the information and overall research conducted. I validated my research through the use of triangulation of data by examining different sources of evidence to build a coherent justification of my themes. This added to the validity of my study, as the perspectives of the participants and their data established my themes by analyzing both my observations and interviews. I found overlapping themes and experiences of the participants to better justify validity; as well, I found information that did not coincide with previous evidence and was contradictory; necessary revisions and further analysis on the collected data were conducted to complete this. I have clarified my shared experience, understood as bias in qualitative methodologies, within the study, as I have personally been affected by the central phenomenon of MMIWG2S. In addition, I utilized reflexivity, as it "refers to the assessment of the influence of the researcher's background and ways of perceiving reality, perceptions, experiences, ideological biases, and interests during the research" (Chilisia, 2012, p. 168). I utilized a peer-debriefer to check my questioning and review my study to make sure that my study is relevant to others (Creswell, 2013, pp. 201-202). I think it is necessary and important to acknowledge mutual respect and reciprocity; as referenced in Chilisia's (2012) book, I utilized *koha*: "recognition of power sharing and responsibilities that connect all those involved in the research process" (p. 181).

I would like to acknowledge the involvement of the participants within this research as being co-creators and authors of this work, as without their stories, this study could not have been completed. I am grateful for their participation and courage in sharing their loved ones' stories. The participants received a copy of their story to confirm and verify the fluidity of their stories and authenticity of the data before the completion of this thesis and my thesis defense. My intention was to keep their stories in their entirety and without much editing or rewording, changing as little as possible to have them remain, as a form of traditional storytelling. To address the ethical issue of ownership, each participant was allocated a paper copy of the completed research study and was involved throughout the process as much as possible, so that they would understand that they are just as much an owner of not only the stories they shared with me but also the research project conducted.

Ethics

I utilized ethical protocols in alignment with the University of Winnipeg's (2019) Ethics Review Board and subsequent policies and procedures and the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2018). My ethics review was completed and approved in August of 2019, and an extension was approved for the summer of 2020. I discussed ethical issues with participants before the research was to be conducted, and all participants signed an informed consent release form to participate within the research study. Ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP) principles were referenced, and this research was informed by it:

Every First Nation has the inherent right to make informed decisions about its information and how it is collected, accessed, used, and shared—the First Nations principles of OCAP are a tool they can use to assert this right. The principles establish how First Nations' data, information, and cultural knowledge should be collected, accessed, used, and shared. OCAP stands for: Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession. (Mecredy et al., 2018, p. 1)

However, as an Ininiw Iskwèw (Cree Woman), I utilized traditional cultural protocols in a good way, as they have been previously gifted to me throughout my life. As such, it was intended that I offer tobacco ties to participants for their input within the study at our first meeting, as the acceptance of tobacco is a signal of their agreement to share their stories; however, due to the impacts of the Covid-19 global pandemic, gifts of medicine bundles, which contained all four

sacred medicines, including tobacco, were given to each of the participants. In addition, I demonstrated to the participants that at any time during the interviewing process, should they not feel comfortable to share or not want to answer a question, they could choose to stop the interview, or answer at a later time, or not answer at all. I considered the participants' needs, as the subject matter is extremely sensitive, and as I am trauma informed,² I utilized my previous knowledge to help with this. I also compiled a list of trauma supports for my participants in the event they would need to seek follow up care. Additionally, it was my intention for an Elder to be present within the process, in the event that a participant was triggered during the Sharing Circle or interview process, but this was not needed, which was discussed and agreed upon by all participants. Extra precautions were taken, as the subject matter is extremely sensitive. I offered the option to participate in a traditional smudging ceremony at the beginning of the session, which each participant gratefully accepted. It was intended that an Elder would say a pray to bless the sharing of knowledge between myself and the participants during the Sharing Circle; however, one of the participants was offered tobacco to do so in place of the Elder.

I relayed to the participants my personal involvement within the study and research by building a foundation of trust and respect. "The emphasis is on respectfully involving the researched as co-participants throughout the research process. To be respectful is to build relationships with the researched" (Chilisia, 2012, p. 119). I began my relationship with each of the participants by introducing who I am and where I am from, my home community, the reasoning behind why I chose my research (personally impacted), as well as my personal interest. I shared my story with them. It was important for me to let them all know my thesis was not simply a task I had chosen to undertake in order to complete an educational program, but is extremely important to me both emotionally and spiritually as part of my own healing journey. I understand that building relationships is of utmost importance within the research process, and I conducted myself with integrity in this way towards my culture and others within my daily life. Participants were under no obligation to remain participants in this study and were notified that they could withdraw their participation from the study at any time.

² I completed a 2-day trauma-informed workshop that equipped me with experience in providing care that takes into account past traumas, and the resulting coping mechanisms, to better understand the participants to help with healing throughout the conducted research.

In keeping within an ethical relational framework, participants have been given pseudonyms within the research that has been documented. Although the real names of participants have not been utilized in print for the purpose of this research, it is my feeling that participants have had an experience where they felt empowered, as this work has given them space to voice their truth and share the stories of their loved ones who are no longer able to speak. Participants gathered for a group session where they shared aspects of their story with the other participants and were unable to remain anonymous. As I previously mentioned, participants were offered tobacco for their participation, but they were also gifted a monetary honourarium and a mini bundle. This bundle consisted of a shell smudge bowl, beaded goose feather, beaded dream catcher, the four traditional medicines: sweet grass braid, sage, cedar, and tobacco tie.

Chapter Five: Healing Stories

Stories, oral history, and traditions have been an integral part of Indigenous peoples' identity, culture and understandings of Indigenous ways of knowing since time immemorial. These key understandings have been linked to the process of healing through a connection to the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects of an individual. Glen McCabe (2008) asserted,

By sharing stories of pain and suffering and also of healing and finding self and meaning in life, Indigenous people cause the creation of increased development of alliances in the general community and greater understanding in those who would be sympathetic to the problems and issues of indigenous people. (p. 147)

In sharing these three stories of people impacted by the problem of MMIWG2S, interwoven with my own experience and the death of my mother, I hoped to create a space where they can voice stories that have yet to be heard. Additionally, my goal was to provide space to continue our journeys of healing and inform others how to better understand the complex problem of MMIWG2S through each of their stories. These stories were all collected on the land to better support the individual needs of each participant's well-being as a holistic method of healing.

Honouring Marie

Originally from Ontario, Angel is a mother and advocate who works as a family support worker for families who have been impacted by the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people. Her work as a helper stems not only from the loss of her Auntie Marie, which is explored throughout her storytelling, but from her lived experience facing many of the negative impacts of colonialism, violence against women, and social justice issues faced by Indigenous Peoples throughout Canada. These experiences shaped her life, prompting her relocation to Manitoba, which led her to her journey to supporting those impacted by the problem of MMIWG2S.

Angel reveals through her storytelling that she did not participate within the National Inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people because of the lack of outreach and collaboration between the police and the inquiry. She felt a lack of support in participating within the National Inquiry for the families of loved ones who have disappeared or been murdered. Angel tells the story of her Auntie Marie who was murdered.

On a beautifully warm sunny day in early July of 2020, I met Angel at Little Mountain Park on the outskirts of Winnipeg, Manitoba. Little Mountain Park is a favourite spot of mine,

where I enjoy the land as well as the berries and medicine offerings that are available to be picked throughout the summer and into the winter season. We met at the south western parking lot, which I wasn't quite familiar with, and headed into the trails together through the densely populated trees. After a long chat and smoking together, which I warmly refer to as burning tobacco, we began walking through the trails, and we soon came upon a spot that we both agreed would be a good place to sit and have a smudge. I had brought my bundle, which is a collection of my sacred items and medicines, as the Elder who was asked to participate was unable to attend at the last minute due to an illness. A sacred bundle is described by Stonechild (2016) in his book *The Knowledge Seeker* as:

Ceremonial objects in which prayers are embedded are to be handled carefully. Medicine objects are not important for their shape as for the power invested in them by spirits. They are viewed as living beings. They are to be fed and occasionally purified. Their power increases over time with use. Objects must be protected by wrapping them and storing them like in a carrying case. They should be destroyed once their owner goes, as unauthorized use is dangerous. (p. 104)

As we left the trail to venture into the woods, having to climb over fallen, rotted logs and brushing aside the branches of trees, I felt as if Mother Earth was welcoming us into her arms with a playful smile, as the mosquitoes sang their songs and buzzed in our ears, and the sun shone through the tops of the green leaves. We sat quietly as I lit the smudge and allowed the smoke to billow over me, as I washed and cleansed myself with it. I passed the abalone shell to Angel, and she repeated the same, carefully catching the smoke in her hands and brushing it over herself. The buzzing mosquitoes continued to make their presence known to us, so I searched my bundle for the tobacco in order for us to place some as an offering to Mother Earth for the gifts that she would share with us on this day. In Renee Linklater's (2014) book *Decolonizing Trauma Work*, she describes tobacco offerings as a sacred medicine to pray with: "The tobacco leads the way. Those Spirits see that and they come and help that person" (p. 135). We thanked Mother Earth with our offerings and prayers within the densely populated bushes and exited onto the trail and headed back to the vehicles to drop off the belongings that we wouldn't need while medicine and berry picking. As we made our way back through the trails to the berry bushes and medicine, we chatted about different berry teachings.

Angel relayed to me the berry teachings that she had been gifted, which focused on the coming-of-age ceremony for Indigenous females coming into their first moon time, moon time

being the name for which Indigenous People call the menstruation cycle. Much like the understandings of the gift given by Creator for being life givers and high regard of respect women received due to this, the moon time works in relation to this. The period of time that menstruation takes place is seen as a ceremony in itself. It was understood that women carry a different amount of power than that of men, and it is a period of time that is sacred and honours reconnection and regeneration to inner-self, balancing energies, prayer, and quiet time (Gaudet & Caron-Bourbonnais, 2015). This is a significant milestone for young women transitioning into adulthood. As Angel relayed to me, young women, shortly after their first moon time, would go out on their fast or vision quest and would be required to only eat berries throughout this time. I asked her if she knew if the young women were allowed to drink water during their fast; however, this detail she was not clear on. Further exploring this ceremony through literature, in her book *Life Stages and Native Women*, Kim Anderson (2011) described that the fast period was an important ceremony that taught youth about cultivating spiritual help towards food security by strengthening their relationships with the spirit world as well as being able to go without food (p. 85).

In sharing traditional knowledge with one another, I relayed to her my teaching that I knew about berries. I learned through ceremony that all animals, all living beings, and all living things on Mother Earth eat berries. Human beings, insects, birds, and even fish in the water, if there's a branch hanging over the water, they will jump out of the water to eat the berries. This is why berries are passed around at ceremonies and shared with each other, and this is an important reason behind why we looked at berries as a healing medicine for everyone on Mother Earth.

As we continued to walk, we came upon a berry bush, and we began picking saskatoons. The trees, which offered us shade from the hot sun, were a welcomed pleasure. As we picked, we talked a little bit about her late Auntie Marie, and I understood how hard of a loss it was for her, as my late Auntie had just passed a few months before this. As Indigenous peoples, our kinship ties are not only tied to our immediate families, but also into our Aunties and Uncles and our cousins, who we look to as our brothers and sisters and our surrogate mothers and fathers. Chelsea Vowel (2011) is a Métis writer who explores these relations in her blog "Âpihtawikosisân." She describes these kinship relationships as deeply rooted within culture and language; within the Cree language, Aunties are given the name "nikâwîs," which loosely translates to my mother. The Cree language has a distinct and often stronger and deeper meaning

depending on each word, which are often difficult to translate into English. Throughout my own study and by reclaiming my own traditional language of Cree, I have come to better understand myself, my identity, and my culture through these understandings.

Our conversation quickly led us into a discussion about Indigenous ways of knowing and the teachings that Angel had grown up with. She mentioned that most teachings are quite easy to follow; it's almost as if it's "common knowledge." In order to follow the teachings that have been relayed and gifted through traditional ceremonies, Knowledge Keepers and Elders, it is not very hard because they are easy to pick up on and they are easily relatable throughout one's life. She mentioned that teachings often come to you at the right time and work well with what you are going through, such as with the loss of her Auntie Marie. We continued to pick berries and chose to move on further into the park to find the sage medicine that we would be picking. As we moved closer to one of the patches of sage medicine, I noted to Angel all of the different berry trees that we were surrounded by as well as medicine; Little Mountain Park is abundant with raspberries, saskatoons, and sage and sweet grass medicines. We doubled back to a large patch of sage, and we put more tobacco down, in a good way. I have been taught by Elders that you lay tobacco in a good way with prayers, giving thanks; for when you take something from the Earth, you must always put something back, and so that tobacco was an offering to Mother Earth for the medicine that we were going to pick.

As we began to pick the medicine, we naturally began to talk a little bit about how each of us were raised. I found this interesting as I reflected on this, thinking of medicine teachings and the roots of the plant we were picking. As with people, roots are important, and when picking any medicines, the roots should be left behind so the plant can continue to grow and thrive in future years. Much like both of our upbringings, although the connection to our culture and heritage had been cut from us due to our families being unable to share knowledge, understanding, or teachings with us, our roots remained strong enough to regrow throughout our lives by picking up things from different people and situations that we lived through.

We both gratefully acknowledged how our daughters are powwow dancers and the importance of this to each of us as well as how, as mothers to young daughters, passing on Indigenous teachings is a very important aspect of who we are as Indigenous women and, most importantly, as Indigenous mothers to those who will raise our future generations. Symbolically,

I see this as aspirations as mothers to raise good medicine, much like the sage we were picking; we are raising our children as strong plants, with strong roots and connections to who we are.

Once we finished collecting our sage, we decided to find a quiet, shady spot where we could sit and Angel could share her story with me. I took Angel to a spot near the sweetgrass that I knew was growing, and we sat down in a shady spot with long grass and trees surrounding us.

She began:

My name is Angel. I am from, Ontario. I lost my Aunt Marie in 2007. Right now, I actually have the opportunity to actually be a helper. My new role has been a family support worker for families of missing murdered Indigenous women.... So to be able to do that is just something that's ... I'm blessed. I'm definitely blessed to do.

She explained that this job was not the job that she had initially applied for, and due to unforeseen circumstances, this job was selected for her through the interview process. She was asked by the employer if she was aware of the National Inquiry and if she understood the issues surrounding missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people. Her response was, "Well yeah, my Auntie was taken," which was what ultimately led to her work and current position. Being a family member, she relayed to me that she struggled with her emotions in doing this work, not only with the emotionally trying aspect but also within herself. She went on to explain that she sometimes felt as if she was taking advantage of the loss of her Auntie Marie and struggled with it quite a bit when she initially began her work. However, she mentioned that she went back to school because of her Auntie and that this was because she didn't want her death to be in vain, which ultimately led to feelings of wanting "to be able to put good, good out into the world and help," which she explained has been very healing and therapeutic.

Angel recalled that she hadn't spoken of her Auntie Marie in some time and that she used to speak with her family about her, but once she was gone, her family was divided and didn't speak as much anymore. She recalls that the family dynamics shifted after her murder:

She, she was a little bit of a free spirit. She struggled with addictions her whole life. She did have some mental health issues, but I honestly don't believe they were mental health issues from what we were told she was supposed to be a Medicine Woman. Umm, but just the way that we grew up, we didn't have those teachings, and so it scared her, and I think that's just ... evolved into her addictions because she did have trauma.... She was raped as a young woman, and she used to see things. So she's always talked about seeing

little people³. Her little angels were always with her, and it's weird.... She'd bring up stuff that she would have, have no inkling [about] and she would bring it up and have details about it, and she'd really catch you off-guard sometimes, and you be like "holy s*** how did you know that?"

Reflecting on what she had shared, I note that there is a huge base of knowledge within Indigenous ways of knowing and spirituality on these understandings. Medicine peoples are understood to know things due to their connection to the spirit world, heightened senses, and through gifts given to them through ceremony, life, and dreams. Particularly, they are often the individuals who have been given respect and legitimacy as an Elder to conduct spiritual ceremonies and are often called teachers or healers. Within the Western sciences, these things have been quantified as the supernatural, phenomenon, or mythology (Stonechild, 2016). Yet within Indigenous ways of knowing, these abilities are commonplace and not unusual or unheard of throughout Indigenous ceremony and the understanding of traditional knowledge; as well, they are highly regarded. Much like the gift giving ability to bear children or the ceremonial act of the moon time, which was previously mentioned, each has its place and function within the world and ways that it is to be used or practiced with or without others. Further to this, it has often been recorded throughout the National Inquiry (2019) into MMIWG2S, that previous trauma, sexual assaults, and rape and overall violence against women form a common theme that is related to specific cases of MMIWG2S throughout the victims' lives.

Angel continued that those traditional understandings brought comfort to her and her family, as her Auntie Marie was also known to have out-of-body experiences and that if "she wasn't there when it happened," it saved her from the pain of the experience of her death. Out-of-body experiences have been well-documented through scientific research by Robert A. Monroe (1977) in his book *Journeys Out of the Body*, as well as Blair Stonechild (2016) in relation to Indigenous peoples. Monroe explained out-of-body experiences as an individual being able to remove themselves into a higher state of awareness, removing themselves from their body and into a different level of consciousness. Her Auntie's out-of-body experiences being a small, somewhat semblance of comfort, Angel continued to describe how the removal of her Auntie's physical presence from the earth and into the spirit world holds bittersweet feelings:

³ The little people are often spoken about in traditional storytelling and mythology in which little people live in the woods and are tricksters (Grant, 1990).

She was suffering in the way she was living, you know? She wasn't living a healthy life, she was just, she was just surviving. You know that's all she was doing; she was just surviving, just getting by, and that kind of ... it makes me happy to think that now she doesn't have to live that life, you know. You know, and it's a horrible way, the way she was taken.

With the impacts of colonization and the hardships faced by Indigenous peoples, this is a sentiment often relayed through the stories of Indigenous people and loved ones. Due to the traumas endured and violence faced by women, often addictions and struggles with mental health are linked to the deaths or disappearances of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people. A review conducted by the Canadian Council on Social Determinants of Health (2015) determined how the higher percentages of cases of mental health and addictions within the Indigenous population is tied greatly to the social determinants of health. Social determinants of health are listed as, but not limited to, income, social status, employment and literacy, childhood experiences and environments, social supports and healthy coping skills, as well as race and gender. Due to the effects of colonialism, Indigenous People have continued to be negatively impacted through their social determinates of health, which creates a significant inequality within their health and wellness, ultimately resulting in higher cases of mental health and addictions issues. As Angel looked off into the trees, she lamented on how her family prayed and hoped that the death of her Auntie Marie would not happen, but it was almost as if they knew it was coming:

There's nothing you can do to kind of, to kind of help get her off that path, you know. You just had to be there and love her and support her, cus you know we only had so much time with her.

Although they almost knew it was coming, it didn't hurt any less once it did. The bittersweet feeling of comfort that our loved ones must no longer face the pain and suffering is a reality tied to the want and need of many to help bring healing to others, in order to end this vicious cycle of intergenerational trauma that plagues Indigenous peoples, which ultimately impacts problems such as MMIWG2S.

Angel went on to talk about the healing circle that her family held for her Auntie Marie when she passed and how it was a part of her own healing. It is my understanding that a healing circle is much like a Sharing Circle, in which family and friends come together to celebrate the life of a loved one who has passed on. As noted by Archibald (2008),

The image of a circle is used by many First Nations peoples to symbolize wholeness, completeness and ultimate wellness. The never-ending circle also forms concentric circles to show both the synergistic influence of and our responsibility toward the generations of ancestors, the generations today and, the generations yet to come. (p. 11)

Angel continued to relay a teaching she had previously heard that when participating in ceremonies, you sit and stay quiet until called upon; nothing should break the circle when participating; leaving the ceremony is frowned upon. Yet when she heard the drum begin to play, it brought tears to her eyes, and she had to leave the room to cry. She remembers a family friend telling her years before her Auntie passed: “After we had our fire and everything for (my grandpa) and we had a little ceremony, and I was told don’t cry. Don’t cry anymore for him cus that’s going to call him back home.” Years later, as Angel left the healing circle held for her Auntie, it caught the attention of her uncle who is an Elder in her community. He relayed to her that the healing circle is meant for crying, that is the place that tears are to be cried for the deceased loved one.

As she recalled this memory, I was reminded of the story relayed to me by the Elder Paul Guimond, who was unable to join us that day. He spoke at length with me about his time spent in a residential school and his experiences, which were largely negative. The trauma and pain he experienced stayed with him for many years, and he used a lot of negative coping mechanisms to deal with his emotions during that time. He explained to me that human beings are like vessels, and when you have painful emotions and they’re inside of you, it’s like the water builds and gradually builds and builds. Eventually, it’s going to overflow, and sometimes it’s going to overflow in different ways in negative ways. He continued that what needs to be done is to pour it out, and the way that’s done is through crying. When crying is released, and “you let that water out,” it leaves so much more room for good things to fill it up, so that a person’s body doesn’t have to overfill with those negative emotions. Often times, our tears are to be released in ceremony; this is why the sweat lodge ceremony is often referred to as the crying lodge. The sweat lodge is a ceremony that is practiced by a wide range of Indigenous Tribes and Nations across Canada and into the United States, Mexico, and South American countries. Chantal Fiola (2015) discussed the significance of the sweat lodge with numerous participants in her book *Rekindling the Sacred Fire*. She largely described their experiences as life-changing and altering. Fiola described her experience speaking about the ceremony to each participant as bringing tears

to her eyes and generating goosebumps, which offers a distinct connection to the power of this healing ceremony (p. 168).

Angel continued with her story to relay that often throughout her work, her emotions are triggered by the stories shared by all the families she works with about their missing or murdered loved ones. She relays that she often wants to cry because of the painful stories and the connection she has as an individual with lived experience, having lost her own Auntie Marie in the same way. She began to laugh as she shared how she encourages the people she works with to cry alongside her, saying, “I’m a crier. I’m going to cry.” This is an action of healing that brings much comfort and healing for both herself and the people she works with, and she emphasized how it’s a feeling inside of her and that she can feel it build:

I’m going to let it out, and I’m going to be happy afterwards. Cus, I let it out, and I released, and I know, and that’s one of the things that I recognized is, that I know what I need.... I can feel it in my body, and that’s my body telling me, “It’s, you just need to let that out.”

I marveled at how in that moment, the connection to the teaching relayed by Elder Paul Guimond was clear, distinct, and striking. Our tears, although painful, bring us to a place of connection to our past, ourselves, our loved ones, and others, which ultimately are tied to our individual and collective healing.

As Angel continued on with her story, she began to look around and stare at the trees that surrounded us, the grass, the plants, the land, the medicines—Mother Earth. She expressed her need to leave the city and connect with the natural world:

I told my sister last week, “I have to get out on the land. I know that it’s a busy weekend, but I have to get out on the land. You might not understand, but it’s just something that I need to do.” I do have that connection. Now I feel like I’ve been rejuvenated. I feel like, like just being home ... it’s different now, because I don’t have many alive family members back home now. So it’s, it’s, it’s an adjustment going back there now, because it’s not like how I remembered it. So just now it’s kinda like I have, I have my family with me even though they’re not there. They’re still there, so it’s just like that connection and that’s why I think that I need to be so like, I need to be on the land. I need to get out on the lake, I need to put my tobacco down, just to have that connection, and it’s just like, like, it’s such a healing thing. I wish I would have gotten that opportunity like 12 years ago, 13 years ago.

This was a powerful moment for me, as I resonated with her. I, too, have felt this same feeling being back home in my community in northern Manitoba for the funeral of my Auntie. There are not too many of my family left either, as I often refer to my sisters and cousins: “We are the

Aunties now.” The connection to land is significant to belonging, and many Indigenous Peoples have been displaced due to the impacts of colonialism, yet our connections to our territories and home communities remain strong. Jesse Thistle (2017) spoke of the impacts of colonialism on our connection to our traditional lands and disconnection of spirit throughout his *Definition of Indigenous Homelessness* that states,

An Indigenous individual’s or community’s separation from the ethos of Indigenous culture, which includes, but is not limited to: a connection to traditional lands (in the absence of which one experiences feelings of a lack of belonging); connection with family and kinship networks; having knowledge of one’s role and place in Indigenous community, which allows for a sense of identity. (para. 34)

This statement is further strengthened by Thistle, who stated that this is also connecting an individual to Creator or an equivalent deity. He asserted,

and a connection to the Creator or equivalent deity... The spiritual disconnection dimension is best understood as a disconnection from Indigenous “spirit,” which includes, but is not limited to, separation from: traditional lands; family and kinship networks; identity; language; and the practice and knowledge of spirituality, worldviews or cosmology. (para. 34)

This aspect of Thistle’s definition gives voice to the spiritual and significant connections felt by Angel when connecting with her traditional homelands as well as how and why connecting with the land permeates good and powerful feelings of rejuvenation and connection with self, Mother Earth, and the cosmos. Indigenous People have this connection to their communities and the land, Mother Earth, which joins them all and completes a circle of connection. With this knowledge, as an Ininiw Iskwew, I know and understand why I can feel the energy of who I am, where I belong, and my connection to my relatives and ancestors within the space of my home community, Norway House Cree Nation. However, there is still a significant feeling as I connect with nature and Mother Earth across Canada. This feeling is felt by many individuals within their communities, Nations, and Territories, as well as across Canada and Turtle Island, a term coined for North America.

Chantelle Richmond (2015) further strengthened this understanding within her essay “The Relatedness of People, Land and Health,” by articulating that one’s health “is bound in significant ways not just in one’s physical body, but it extends to intimate, spiritual relationships with the land—and all of the medicines the land provides—and also the social relationships one has with family members and the wider community (p. 54). Indigenous People understand how

the land keeps us centred and whole and the connection and belonging we feel when we connect with Mother Earth, her medicines, and the gifts she has to share with us. This shows how land-based healing benefits us and our need to connect with ourselves and Mother Earth symbiotically.

Angel continued with light-hearted laughter and spoke of how everything happens for a reason and how blessed she is to do the work she does in the community:

It's weird though. Just being to do the work that we're doing, and the work that you're doing. It's like, just, I guarantee you my Auntie, your mom, are damn proud of us! Like we are, we're working with some of the most dear issues to our hearts and you know, that's hard. Not everybody can do that. Even my cousin, I was talking to her about and she like, "I couldn't do that." You know, and it's just something that I feel like we're blessed, cus not everyone is going to get this opportunity. You know, to be able to honour and to be able to put that work and just share that love and share that healing and share that medicine picking that you're sharing today. You know, (*Sighs) You're going to make me cry. It's like that connection with other people, that not something everybody understands.... to me, I just feel I hold it a little extra close to my heart.

In response to her sentiments, I began to tear up, as my emotions and spirit were calling me to release my pain. I thought about each of our loved ones and the work that we both are doing to honour and remember them and the countless others who are still mourning the loss of their loved ones. My intention is much like Angel's, which is to honour our loved ones and those without voices to speak. I relayed to Angel a teaching I have heard more than once throughout my life, as I am doing my own healing and work to reconnect with my loss of identity through learning my Indigenous language of Ininimowin (Cree) and cope with the loss of my Mother. Mitoni Aski (Hard Earth) carries a deeper meaning than what can be articulated through the use of the English language. However, what it loosely translates to is: It is a hard place that we live here on earth, referencing and acknowledging that the spirit world is a better and more beautiful place than Earth. In relaying this teaching, I hope that it brings comfort to Angel, as this teaching I carry in order to comfort myself thinking of the loss of my Mother and the many relatives that have passed on into the spirit world. I believe that once our spirit passes back into the spirit world, we are welcomed by our ancestors to be reunited and joined with the place that we have come from before our time on Earth.

Elder Danny Musqua or Mosôm Danny, as he has been referred to in a variety of books, confirmed this teaching within Blair Stonechild's (2016) book *The Knowledge Seeker*. Mosôm Danny further explained that each person on earth has travelled from the spirit world in order to

gain knowledge from within the physical world; there is always a purpose to their experience within the physical world (pp. 49–50). This teaching offers understandings to “Mitoni Askiy” and with these understandings gives reason to why the seemingly endless problem of MMIWG2S continues to happen and why our loved ones are taken so often, which continue to affect us many years later once our relatives have travelled back to the spirit world.

Angel moved on to describe her work in the community as “heart work” and relayed how special and meaningful the work is to her past and her ongoing healing. Heart work is a term that has been used to describe work within the Indigenous community that has significant and particular meaning to the person doing the work, ultimately work that comes directly from the heart with pure intentions. As Angel described the work she is doing, she continued to describe the connection and purpose, incorporating our chance meeting at the Manitoba Coalition for MMIWG2S meeting: “It’s almost like, there’s been certain people put in my path.... It might not just be, like, a certain person, but a thing, and they’re just put in my path for a reason.” She asserted that everything within her life has led her to the work that she is doing, as well as having the opportunity to speak about her Auntie Marie, to tell her story, and honour her memory.

(*laughs) I honestly feel like it benefits me more some days. I found my people. I feel like I found my place. I just, maybe it’s all the support that I didn’t have before, all of the connection. Like there’s not, there’s that beautiful moment, but there’s also that, little bit of pain in there but at the same time, that pain almost makes it’s beautiful in itself, because that to me, shows that there was love, we loved my auntie we cared for her.

Reflecting on her powerful words, I am reminded that love is our greatest gift and curse because in our grief, we are shown how much we loved and that love doesn’t go away. Something that my Dad had said to me just after the loss of my Auntie was: “That’s the thing about love. You can’t hide love. It shines out of people. And everyone sees it, even though you can’t see it, it’s known that you love.” These stories, our work, this is our act of love. In saving space to share stories of our loved ones, we love. Through a model effective in addressing Indigenous People’s path to healing using a comparison of the Anishinaabe Seven Grandfather teachings in alignment with the Kubler-Ross seven stages of grief cycle, love is expressed as “mutual, it is a balancing element and brings peace. When love is in our every action we are better prepared to ‘honour’ others” (Morin, 2017, p. 2). Our actions, delivered through love, are effectively honouring our loved ones and acting as a form of healing from our grief.

Angel moved forward with her story to focus on the police involvement within her Auntie Marie's death. She expressed that she felt that her family was one of the "lucky one's," as the person responsible for the death of her Auntie Marie was found relatively quickly. Yet with that finding, she has guilt, as many others much like her family have not found the people responsible in order to find a sense of justice or closure. She continued to explain the circumstances surrounding the death of her Auntie Marie. She relayed that Marie's daughter discovered her in her apartment after her death; the door was open, and she had been lying there in the most vulnerable of circumstances, for some time. This was quite heart retching for her to describe, as there were reports from the neighbours that they had heard her crying and yelling; however, the police were never called. This is very familiar in many cases of violence against women, as they are left unreported and are missing within statistical data (Brennan, 2011; Native Women's Association of Canada, 2010; RCMP, 2014). Marie's daughter relayed to Angel:

It hits you, it hit you, as soon as you were in there.... How long was she there for, like, so many days and nobody, nobody, realized anything? Nobody said a word. Nobody went to go check on her so, and this was probably very, very like more traumatic for my cousin, than actually finding her, in a sense.

I felt a sense of heartache within this moment, as these were very similar circumstances to that of the way that my mother was found. When exploring the statistics of MMIWG2S, we think of the over 1,400 women, girls, and Two-Spirit people who have been estimated through recorded data, but without accurate data and lack of reported cases, it has been theorized by Indigenous women's groups that the number is upward of 4,000. These unheard voices need to continue to be heard. These experiences, their stories filled with love and also pain have gone unnoticed for much too long. We must honour and carry their stories, their voices, their realities, the love, and the pain in order to create more awareness and education for the impacts of violence against women and to the problem of MMIWG2S in order for a solution to be found.

Angel described that once her cousin reported the murder to police, that because her cousin was not living in Thunder Bay, Ontario, and because she was a visitor, that she was promptly dropped off at a homeless shelter, and they "took her shoes, took her ID, took everything. Sent her to a homeless shelter overnight; she was not to contact family. She wasn't allowed to, like, (do) nothing. So she just lost her mom and here she is alone." Angel relayed that no supports or victim services officials were in attendance to offer their help or support to someone who had just been in a terribly traumatic experience. Angel explained that the next day,

family drove in from out of town to be with her cousin, but she was distressed that her cousin had been left alone in a shelter without comfort. This was a big failure in her mind of what was missing. Care should have been offered.

She revealed her surprise in the actions of police, as the investigation wrapped up quite quickly. After only two months after the death of her Auntie Marie, using a stop light camera, the person responsible for her death was caught. Although the investigation wrapped up quickly as the perpetrator was known to police and it was apparent he was on the police's radar, Angel described her unwavering dissatisfaction passionately by stating,

And you know what really pissed me off too? Is that the guy who killed her was supposed to be a registered sex offender, and he had a book of charges. You know assault, sexual assault, sexual battery, the list goes on and on and on and on. Why did they not go and find this guy? If he was supposed to be on the registered sex offender list, that's something that I never got? Like, he should have been in jail. He shouldn't have been out and walking free being able to have that opportunity to hurt more people.

She expressed how she felt that this was a failure of the justice system, and he should not have been on the streets with the opportunity for this to happen to her Auntie. Although the investigation was completed in a timely manner and the police completed their investigation, capturing and charging the perpetrator, she stated, "One thing, if I could change anything, I wish they would have had a little bit more contact with more of the family." It was evident that there has been a distinct connection for Angel with the aspect of support. She has created a strong body of support for herself through her work, her colleagues, and families that she helps, but she, along with her cousin and family, all lacked support from the police moving through the process after the death of her Auntie. She continued on to share her truth by stating what she believes would be a large benefit in this process:

The police need to realize this. When a trauma like this happens to a family, it changes the dynamic. You're not always going to be close. It, a lot of times, tears the family apart. So, I feel like, if they would have had a little bit more of communication and kind of just getting that updated contact info for us. Because you know, I had cousins that were invited to the inquiry, and I, I didn't hear a word about it, and I was really close with my Aunt, and these were cousins that weren't, weren't very close.

In thoroughly describing her dissatisfaction, she wondered why there was not more collaboration between the inquiry and policing. "It was almost like, I don't want to say a slap in the face, but it was, it was hurtful because it was like why? Why wasn't I? I wasn't able to have that opportunity to speak my truth. Or even support my cousin." She explained how she felt a

lack of support from police and within the National Inquiry, explaining that if her family would have had more support from either sides, her family would have had the opportunity to tell her Aunt's story at the National Inquiry into MMIWG2S. She stressed to me the importance of sharing and honouring her Auntie's story: "She's not just a nameless person." This is a sentiment repeated from many other families with loved ones who are missing or murdered. One particular family member who shared at the National Inquiry in Saskatoon stated, "It's a relief to tell these stories." Families impacted want to share their stories to help find solutions to the problem of MMIWG2S in order to help prevent the loss and grief that so many are impacted by (Warick, 2017). The importance of storytelling is strongly connected to Indigenous Peoples' culture; the National Inquiry (2019) stated, "First Nations, Métis, and Inuit societies rely on stories to illustrate lessons, values, and laws in a way everyone can understand" (p. 37). Not only does storytelling give voice to those unheard and relay important aspects of Indigenous teachings to inform and educate, the impacts of storytelling on healing have been highlighted within the National Inquiry and within many instances of health research (Greenwood et al., 2015; Linklater, 2014; National Inquiry, 2019). Angel readily admitted throughout and after the completion of the storytelling process that she found comfort and healing by sharing of her truth and honouring her Auntie Marie through this process and her current work in the community.

Angel continued her story to reflect on her own history and past: "Growing up, when you don't have that strong woman leadership. To instill you're a strong Anishinaabe Kwe... [Anishinaabe Woman], I truly believe like that's one of the most powerful things is, empowered women, empowering women.... That's it right there." Her reflection holds space for methods of decolonization, opening the conversation for the need to connect young Indigenous women to empowered Indigenous matriarchs. This suggests that a potential solution to the problem of MMIWG2S is to empower Indigenous matriarchs to teach about Indigenous ways of knowing, stories, culture, identity, and resiliency to our young women. In this way, we can see and understand how damaging the loss of our traditional Indigenous matriarchs has been through the impacts of colonization and the issue of MMIWG2S. The National Inquiry (2019) found that the issue of MMIWG2S was genocide, and within the effects of genocide, it was used as a tool to bring down Indigenous Nations and to lessen the number of Indigenous Peoples across Canada, in order to stop the continuing growth of the Indigenous population. This holds space for the need to address Angel's truth.

Angel brought to light the countless other families she has observed who have not had a positive experience with police. She remarked that it's challenging to see this as well as having seen some pretty, pretty nasty remarks from some people. You know, even, even people that ... work on the police. Like, I, I've seen it, and I've heard them make some, outright, rude, and ignorant comments and they're supposed to be helping us?

She explained that her dissatisfaction with policing has been not within the experience she has had with the investigation into her Auntie's murder, but within the responses and actions she has observed with policing throughout her life. This remark generates a vivid recollection within historical data on negative experiences between Indigenous Peoples and policing that stem all the way back to the North West Mounted Police. The historical and current relationship between police has been and continues to be strained. Angel mentioned earlier that the support and relationship between herself and police was almost non-existent. This brings to mind that a potential solution to mitigate this issue would be to build stronger relationships between families of MMIWG2S and police forces. The National Inquiry (2019) recommended within its calls for justice:

9.1 We call upon all police services and justice system actors to acknowledge that the historical and current relationship between Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people and the justice system has been largely defined by colonialism, racism, bias, discrimination, and fundamental cultural and societal differences. We further call upon all police services and justice system actors to acknowledge that, going forward, this relationship must be based on respect and understanding, and must be led by, and in partnerships with, Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people.

9.2 We call upon all actors in the justice system, including police services, to build respectful working relationships with Indigenous Peoples by knowing, understanding, and respecting the people they are serving. (p. 190)

These calls for justice were developed throughout the stories shared by participants as well as extensive research throughout the inquiry process. Angel's reflections further strengthen these recommendations. Angel reflected on a specific situation within Thunder Bay, in which a youth that she had previously worked with had been found in the river under suspicious circumstances.

But they (police) kind of deemed it like she just was in the river and just drowned and that's it. These kids are growing up on reserves that are on lakes. They're growing up with those tools, I don't know, I don't know about those anyone else who's grown up on my home, my hometown is on the Lake. I grew up swimming since I was yay big. That is just part, that was just part of life. You go out with your uncles and your aunts and your grandparents and not stressed and you learn out on the land. That's where you go, fishing and you know and she was one of those girls. How in the hell did she drown? So it's just

like stuff like that, it's just I feel like a lot of the time they're (police) just really quick to, to just assume that it happened, case closed.

My thoughts began to move to the countless others who have had no investigations into their untimely suspicious deaths, having not found justice, or even received the acknowledgment of their murders by police; I am reminded of my mother. I begin to share with Angel a little bit of her story, "They didn't investigate my mother's death." I explain how I was the first to be notified and that I have since collected the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) reports from police and the medical examiner in order to try and find more information. Sadly, these documents did not provide me with any further information than I already knew. My own story shared many similarities to Angel's Auntie Marie's story in the way in which my own mother was found. I questioned police and revealed to Angel,

How do you find a woman dead (at the age of 37, with no health problems) in her home, in her apartment? We looked for keys, they were not there. There were no keys. Her door was locked, but there were no keys. They did not investigate; they, I don't believe they asked neighbours. I don't believe they did any investigation, and on her medical report, it says inconclusive cause of death. Inconclusive and it also says on their medical report it is assumed because she had previous mental, mental health issues and addictions issues, that was the cause of death, and I don't believe that.

Angel responded to my admission: "And I think as family members, we know." I think back to Angel's revelation about the mental health and addictions struggles that her Auntie faced, which are similar to those that plagued my mother, many of my own relatives, and those of Indigenous Peoples across Canada. The impacts of colonialism have severely impacted the population of Indigenous Peoples within Canada. Within my own family, we have experienced involvement in the child welfare system, and my mother and her siblings were all a part of the 60s Scoop. Angel revealed to me that she did not grow up with her culture, teachings, and understandings. This experience of cultural and spiritual disconnection is felt by Indigenous Peoples across Canada. Extensive research on this topic, uncovered through the stories shared in the National Inquiry, found that of the systems more extensively shared by people were those of the residential and day school experiences, the 60s Scoop, or child welfare systems, tying each experience to violence against Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people, as well as health and mental health and addictions. The National Inquiry (2019) reported,

More specifically, the ongoing suffering caused by these experiences through the disruption of family systems continues to jeopardize the safety of Indigenous women,

girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people. This is particularly true for those left to deal with the legacies of these systems for their families, as manifested in physical or emotional abuse, in unresolved pain, in poverty, or in substance abuse. (p. 358)

Further to this, these disconnections and negative effects of colonialism should not be causes of death and should be addressed in order to work towards a solution of violence against women in Canada and the critical issue of MMIWG2S.

Angel recommended the need for programming that supports families of MMIWG2S. She continued to commend the work of programs within Winnipeg, as there is a large base of support for Indigenous Peoples impacted by not only MMIWG2S but also the negative effects of colonization. However, she suggested that programming should be targeted as place based, within each community, city, or geographical location, as the needs of each community is different. She felt that more programs should be developed, as she has seen the need in other places that don't have the much-needed and necessary programs.

Although the investigation into her Auntie's death was completed in a timely manner by police, she proceeds to name the justice system as another area in need of change. The perpetrator of Angel's Auntie Marie's murder was handed an 11-year sentence; however, due to circumstances upheld by the justice system, Angel believes that he will only serve 3-4 years. Angel asserted, "I don't believe the court system did their job." Cases in which the justice system have mismanaged the deaths of Indigenous people are quite lengthy. Prominent names that come to mind in cases that lack justice would be that of Tina Fontaine, a 14-year-old girl whose body was found in the Red River, whose presumed killer has gone free, having been acquitted of any crime. In addition, the killer of Cindy Gladue, whose body was desecrated within the court room, being put on display and used as evidence, is currently being tried again for only manslaughter after an appeal by the prosecutors, and having been previously acquitted in 2015. Both of these cases have received considerable attention and grassroots advocacy due to the circumstances that led to each of their deaths and the court proceedings that have both been looked at as failures to family members of MMIWG2S, because the presumed killers have walked free ("MMIWG Inquiry Reading List," 2019). Angel mentioned the National Inquiry into MMIWG2S and stated, "Well even look at the 231 calls-to-action.... How many are in place?" At the time of our conversation, July 2020, it had been just over one year since the release of the National Inquiry (2019), and none of the calls had been met. To date, there have been two measures taken: one

made by the Vancouver Police Department entitled, “Learning From Lost Lives” (Rankin & Gill, 2019), a 75-page report released in November of 2019 and most recently in December of 2020, a 15-page document released by the Yukon government, “Changing the Story to Upholding Dignity and Justice: Yukon’s MMIWG2S+ People Strategy” (Yukon Advisory Committee, 2020).

Angel stressed the importance of support and how much of a struggle it is for others who are dealing with the death or disappearance of a loved one. She once again stressed the importance of versatility and fitting the needs of each individual within their specific situation. She emphasized that everyone is “going to deal with things differently, not every way is going to fit every person.” In taking into consideration the work that she does with others much like herself who have a missing or murdered loved one, she shared that the needs of everyone are different and should be addressed in the ways that best suit those individuals and their circumstances:

I’ve worked with people who, who are very religious with, with the church.... I’ve work with people who are very culturally active. You know, and it’s just like, you know, they have their own different ways, and not everybody has a strength when they’re kinda going through all of this. To be able to be like, okay, I’m going to hunt down these resources, cus resources are hard to find, if you don’t know what you’re looking for.

She further suggested the need for advocates for the families of MMIWG2S. She believes that when things are coming to a halt, such as the investigation or lack of information, there should be someone there to support the family. This would ensure that the families receive information, reach out, make connections, or “put the gears to them,” which would empower advocates to have the responsibility of taking needed actions with addressing families’ concerns with police and being a go between. This would also help to relieve some of stress on families during such a difficult time, and placing it on the shoulders of an advocate who knows the resources can help the family moving forward. Further to this suggestion, she stressed,

I really think the police need to be educated on the resources, on who to contact and all of that stuff. If you’re going to be involved in this particular case, in like, you need to be an advocate for them (the family).

This is a suggestion made within recommendations, and the dissatisfaction of policing within cases of MMIWG2S for years as cases have come to light, and awareness has been raised across Canada. The Manitoba Justice Family Liaison Contacts (FLCs) has been identified within the

Government of Manitoba's (2019) *Final Written Submission to the National Inquiry* as the body that coordinates these types of services to loved ones within homicide cases as well as being a body that supported families during the Inquiry process. However, it was determined through the collection of these data that none of the participants or myself had any knowledge or experience with the FLC to date (Government of Manitoba, 2019). As two of the participants' stories related to cases out of the Province of Manitoba, the bodies associated with those cases would presumably be the Province of Alberta and Province of Ontario family liaison contacts, both participants were found to have no contact or communication with any organizations within those provinces. Angel furthered this argument by stating,

You're supposed to be there to help them, not keep them in the dark, and I get, like, with the court process, it's kind of hard too because you don't get all of the information that you want and that's one of the things that are really hard because they do, court wise, they do have to keep some stuff kinda tight-lipped, but at the end of the day, there's so much information that these families need.... I don't want to say put them at ease, but sometimes when your mind's going and you have all of these questions, even if it's just something, something small.... All police need to be really informed, and I think that they, I think they need more training. They need more mental health training, they need more cultural sensitivity ... trauma training, sensitivity.

This has been a common narrative when exploring stories of MMIWG2S, many families' dissatisfaction and recommendations stem from the cultural differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. There seems to be a lack of understanding and cultural sensitivity that is lacking within instances of police contact. Recommendation 57 of the Truth and Reconciliation's 94 Calls to Action, which was released in 2015 stated,

We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to provide education to public servants on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal–Crown relations. This will require skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism. (p. 7)

As police officers serve the public, this recommendation should relate to the need for better programming that addresses Angel's recommendation for better cultural sensitivity training. In order to address many of the societal problems that face Indigenous Peoples, including MMIWG2S, training for individuals should be a top priority.

In closing her storytelling, she left a distinct message: "You just got to keep putting one foot in front of the other, that's all you can do." I thanked her for sharing with me, and we got up

from where we were sitting, collected our belongings in order to leave the park, and we slowly walked all the way back to where our vehicles were. Throughout the walk, we reflected on her story and talked a little bit about the systemic issues that continue to impact Indigenous Peoples in Winnipeg and across Canada. We talked a little bit about how some of our young men are lost because they are not going out on their Vision Quest, and they seek a sense of belonging, a way out of poverty, comfort, and family unity from gangs. I mentioned a scholar that I had heard of who had done research on the structure of gangs and how there was a hierarchical system working strategically to help people gain a way out of poverty, a sense of control from the feelings of being ousted from society, and to be able to get just basic needs met. As we left the greenery of the mini forest of the park and got to our vehicles in the parking lot, the sun shone down and left me filled with a warmth that touched my heart. I hugged Angel and thanked her again for sharing her story as we waved and said our goodbyes.

Honouring Leeann

Lorraine is originally from northern Manitoba. She works as a team leader within an Indigenous-based education program for Indigenous youth, which promotes culture and Indigenous teachings. Lorraine is a mother, an active member of her church as well as within the Indigenous community, and has significant roots to traditional hunting practices. She shared the story of the murder of her late sister.

Lorraine disclosed that her lack of involvement within the national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit peoples had much to do with the lack of support for her family and other circumstances that impacted their ability to make a collaborative decision to participate together at the time the inquiry took place. Additionally, they felt they did not have the adequate support or guidance from the inquiry about how to apply in order to be a part of the process. Lorraine shared the story of her sister, Leeann, who was murdered.

I met with the Elder Paul Guimond at Little Mountain Park in mid-July of 2020 on what initially appeared to be a warm sunny day. We sat at a picnic table to have a chat together while we waited for Lorraine to arrive. As we were to be going out on the land with the medicines that day, we chatted a bit about his wife's garden. He relayed some teachings to me about how the garden was tended by his wife and told me how she speaks to her plants. He explained that this is

a good way to grow plants and that the plants should be cared and tended to in the same ways, much like people. They need care and attention much like human beings, and speaking to them has proven to be effective in growing very large plants. As I quickly joked that I was not a very good gardener, he related to me that his brother-in-law had planted some seeds in his wife's garden, and she had no idea what type of plants they were. She spoke to the plants just the same, and they grew very tall. Shortly thereafter, Lorraine arrived, and we smudged with sage together and proceeded to walk out into the park together. Something I had noted that I found interesting was that as we walked into the park, Lorraine stopped and exclaimed, "I found a dime!" This was significant to me, as I have heard from different individuals that finding a dime is a sign that your angels are with you and that their spirits are revealing to you that they walk with you at that time. Finding a dime is a sign of good luck and a reminder that our spirit helpers are there watching us and guiding us through our journeys on earth.

Paul continued to offer his teachings about plants and medicines. He talked about how when we talk to our medicines, when we harvest them, those are our prayers being put into those medicines, and in order for those medicines to work, we must believe in the prayers that we put into them. Further to that, he emphasized that those medicines will only be healing if we believe that they will heal us. There is a distinct relationship built between the medicine picker and the plants that are being harvested. Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) stated, within her book *Braiding Sweetgrass*, that the earth, plants, and medicines must be listened to as if we are learning to speak its language. Paul spoke at length with us about lily pads and shared how they could be used to heal bones. He specifically shared a story with us about his son and how he had a problem with his hip when he was born. His son's hip was wrapped in the lily pad, and it was a relief on his bones and joints that ultimately healed the problem, and his son has lived an active and full life without any additional hip problems. Lorraine offered a similar story in which someone on her reserve had gone to an Elder who is a medicine healer. A medicine healer is much like an Elder or a medicine man who performs ceremonies such as the sweat lodge. A medicine healer is an individual who carries ecological knowledge with plants in order to use them as medicines to heal ailments. The individual she spoke about had third-degree burns on his arm, and the Elder used a salve that was made from traditional medicines to treat the burns, and his arm was also wrapped in lily pads. A week later, he returned to her, and his arm had already

started to heal. She described to us that if the individual had gone to the hospital, they would have had to receive skin grafts in order to heal their third-degree burns.

The Elder Paul continued to tell us how healing must take place in order for our people to begin to see how anger and resentment have been hindering us; if we're still angry and upset, we can't find healing. He spoke about his time in residential schools and how it had negatively affected him. Throughout the time, while we were being related teachings by Elder Paul, the clouds started to come in, and it looked like it was going to rain. In the distance, I could hear the Thunderbirds, and I could see lightning. Paul also picked up another medicine from the ground, lavender, that he said was good for sleep as well as for healing. Much like sage, you can dry it and burn it and cleanse yourself with its smoke. When talking about sage, he talked about the stock or the stem being what can be used to make tea; sage tea cleanses inside your body and improves your health. As we began to walk back to the parking lot, it began to spit rain and continued to thunder and lightning, louder and closer to us. We all talked about the Sharing Circle and about the dates that would work for us to meet again, as it began to rain harder. Lorraine and I said our goodbyes to Paul, and he got in his truck and drove off. This is when the recorded interview commenced.

I feel it is important to note that as the storytelling portion began, it started pouring rain, with such force that we were worried that it would be too loud and drown out Lorraine's voice on the recording. At this time, throughout the data collection and as the rain that was coming down fast and hard, I began to think about how in the previous year in my first fast, it had rained the whole time. "Fasting is a form of sacrifice that helps to discipline the body and focus it on the spiritual quest" (Stonechild, 2016, p. 53). When I had completed my fast after three nights and four days without food or water, I spoke to the Elder, and he had told me that my clan was the Thunderbird Clan. Thunderbirds have been represented within traditional storytelling throughout almost all Indigenous Nations across Turtle Island (North America) and are described as being giant birds that are connected to the thunderstorms as well as the spiritual realm (Bender, 2020).

The clan system is a system used by many Indigenous tribes: for example, the Mikmaw Mi'kmaq or Mi'kmaq in Eastern Canada use it as a form of strength within their world view and traditional social structure, which nurtures an interconnectedness and healthy spirit of connectivity:

The clan system within our Mi'kmaw Nation has existed since time immemorial. Clans are named after animals that lived year'round within our Traditional territory of Mi'kma'ki... the clan line is passed down via the mother. Each clan has a Matriarch whose role is as an overall Grandmother to those in her clan. (Marshall et al., 2015, p. 49)

Many clans have annual gatherings, which celebrate belonging, culture, identity, teachings, and connection to Mother Earth. The clan system is an integral aspect of understanding one's identity and interconnectedness and balance within their world and relations to kin, spirit, and the natural world.

I found the rainstorm and arrival of the Thunderbirds especially coincidental, as during the time that we were going to do portions of the research, such as when I held the sacred fire and feast to begin my research project, it had been raining, and I had to quickly prepare in order for the fire not to be put out by the rain. It was a surprise, as the weather had been fine during that day, and the rain was unexpected. I saw this as a test given to me as a fire keeper, as I was being tested to see if I could keep the fire going. Within the holding of a sacred fire, it is to be burned for a certain amount of time, to be determined, and the fire keeper is to sit with the fire and not allow it to go out. There is an important teaching that I have received through ceremony, which speaks of the women being the fire keepers. The Ininimowin word for fire is "*Iskotew*," and the word for woman is "*Iskwew*." It is not a coincidence that these words look very similar to each other, as the teaching is that the word "*iskotew*" originates from the word "*iskwew*" because the women are the heart of the home, they keep the family warm and loved, much like the fire. In the instance that I had to protect the fire from the rain, I was motivated by the loud crashes of the thunderbirds as they sounded in my ears. I felt this teaching ring true within me and resonate with my spirit, as I was able to protect the fire with a makeshift metal cover and keep the fire alive, just barely, to reignite; I felt a sense of humble pride and strength, as if I had achieved the task that was given to me from the spirits. The thunder has always been quite comforting for me, and I felt as if it was not just a coincidence that it was raining so hard the day I met with Lorraine and that the Thunderbirds had come to make their presence known to both of us on that day. I felt as if they knew about my project, they knew about what we were planning on doing, and it was almost like I felt that they were in agreement by showing me that I was doing things in a good way. I felt a certain amount of spiritual connection in collecting this specific story and the conditions that were being given to us through the sharing of the story.

As the rain poured down on us in the safety of my vehicle, Lorraine began immediately telling the story of the circumstances surrounding the death of her sister. “She passed away, I think it was, October 31, 2004 ... My late sister.” She recalled that her sister was living in Brandon at the time, and she was a mother of three small kids: two toddlers and a baby that was only six weeks old. Lorraine continued to elaborate on the relationship her sister Leann was in at the time of her death. She described it as “really rocky” because of his lifestyle, and she expressed that she felt there was a lack of respect for her sister in a loving way from her partner and children’s father. She remembered back to her sister’s teenage years, describing that her sister “had it really tough.... I think she had it tough ever since ... she was young.” She continued to describe her sister’s struggles, specifically mentioning how her sister was rebellious and disobeyed their parents: “But, but there has to be a reason why she wasn’t listening; she must have been going through things that she wasn’t able to talk about.” As these words were spoken, thunder rolled in the distance. I felt this was significant in the way of foreshadowing, as this was tied to the circumstances surrounding Leann’s death and something that was further explored throughout her story. Lorraine went on to further explain that she felt that her sister sadly chose unhealthy ways to cope, ultimately moving further away from healing. In digesting what had been expressed by Lorraine, I can only be moved to think about the many ways in which a large majority of Indigenous People have been impacted by colonization and, in turn, the creation of the problem of MMIWG2S. Within the first few minutes of her story, she has clearly articulated connections to violence against women, overarching connections to patriarchy, as well as suggesting there may be many instances of trauma that were experienced by her late sister.

Quickly moving into a different line of thinking, Lorraine remarked, “She was still my big sister.... I just loved her.” She recalled fondly a specific loving memory from her childhood growing up with her big sister, where they would bond:

When I was a kid and she would just, like, leave for a walk. I would, I would, I remember holding onto her one leg and holding on and being small and holding onto her leg when she was trying to leave and trying to take off. (*laughs) And I just remember, even when she would come home, she would ummm, like go down, to like my level onto the ground, because I was a kid, and she would hold out her arms and say, “Chips, drink, gum, bar!” and I would run towards her because every time she came home, she would, she would bring me something like that; she would bring me a treat. So like, I cherished, like umm, that relationship that I had with her, because she had, had like that, motherly love already ... and she looked after me in a way.

Much like Angel's story, in which she discussed the importance and impactful role of her Auntie in her life, Lorraine explored the kinship relationship that she had with her older sister. The importance of this memory gives voice to the strength of their relationship and how great of a loss it was for her. The kinship ties of sisters is an unbreakable bond. Their spirits are tied to one another; big sisters are seen as mother figures, much like the roles of our Aunties and surrogate mothers. This understanding has been relayed to me by a friend who has translated the meaning of older sister in Ininimowin, "*Omisamâw*," which means the person to look up to: an older role model. He confirmed with me that there is a distinct spiritual connection and deeper meaning to the kinship relationships within Cree culture other than those just put simply through the translation into the English language.

Lorraine continued to explore the significance of their relationship and was reminded of when their relationship took a turn for the worse:

There's those changes in her life that I started noticing that, umm, she was getting into drugs and alcohol, mostly alcohol, and ... that kind of, like, hindered our relationship. But it was still there, but it was, but I was still able to bond with her, but not as much as, as before because she'd be gone sometimes.

The impacts of addictions were something explored throughout all of the participant stories and even within my own mother's story. This emerging theme brings voice to one of the causes of MMIWG2S. The use of alcohol and drugs has been shown to create family breakdowns, state interventions with child welfare, and a myriad of different negative impacts, which stem from colonial effects on Indigenous Peoples, predominantly linked to the effects of residential schools (Richmond, 2015). The stories explored and shared through this work strengthen this argument.

Lorraine cleared her throat and went on to describe how her sister Leeann was the person that she used to tell her secrets to and how she was the person who taught her about a girl's first moon time. This very important milestone within a young woman's life is a significantly sacred journey that was described within Angel's story. A young woman's first moon time was an extraordinary gift that was given by the Creator, and a woman's power was heightened at the time of her first menstruation (K. Anderson, 2011). Lorraine's bond with her sister was considerably different in comparison to that of her other siblings, as she was her "favourite sister," and the memories that she shared with her were tied to many firsts in her life that she had never experienced before. She remembered fondly how her sister was her first teacher, which has often been used to describe the relationship between a mother and daughter.

Being that Leeann was significantly older than Lorraine, I reflect on their relationship in remembrance of traditional roles of Indigenous Peoples before the impacts of colonization. Indigenous children were often left alone by their parents due to the need to provide for their families, and children were often left alone with the Elders, but in some instances, the older siblings were there to tend and care for their younger siblings. These roles were an important and integral aspect of a successful and healthy community. Kim Anderson (2011) explored the social organization of a healthy “traditional” community in her book *Life Stages and Native Women*; a healthy community thrived on the strength of interconnectedness and symbiotic relationships of all people that was strictly balanced through these relationships (p. 99). The broken bond between Lorraine and her sister Leeann speaks to how these key relationships have attributed to furthering the problem of MMIWG2S.

Lorraine stopped her story momentarily, as the rain barreled down fiercely and extremely loud; we had to check the recording to hear if she was still audible over the sound of rain. This instance is a reminder of our purpose: to bring the voices of those unheard to the forefront and be heard, despite the many obstacles that have been in place to drown out the sounds of our voices. Although loud and intense, the rain was not powerful enough to create enough sound to drown out Lorraine’s voice on the recording; she picked up her story to describe the situation she was in at the time of her sister’s death.

I was living in Gillam, that time, when she was living in Brandon.... We were such a far distance from each other, that time.... This one night, I had a dream that, you know, like my sister passed away, she died. Like and I didn’t, I felt, like, really bad and like, what was that dream about, what was I dreaming? So I didn’t know at the time that when you tell, when you have a dream like that you’re supposed to tell your family, so that they can pray or that or that it’s a warning to contact that person that you’re dreaming about. Like, I didn’t know that I was only 18 that time or 19, and I had that dream, and I told my partner at the time of what I was dreaming about and, and I wasn’t in a good place too in life. So, so I didn’t say anything to anybody. I didn’t want to see him, make it seem like, I was in trouble for dreaming or like, that you shouldn’t dream like that. I didn’t want to get a backlash if like, I told my parents or if I told my dad. I didn’t want to make it seem like, well she probably wants that to happen. I didn’t want anybody to think, like, that because never in my life would I even think of something like that to happen to anybody and it was just ... and so I just kept it and that dream. I didn’t say, I only told one person.

Three days later she received a phone call from someone within her community who told her that “something happened,” and she described the feeling of hearing the news as: “That’s when my heart stopped.” At this moment, she didn’t know what had happened, but her dream

was lingering in her mind, and she immediately called her parents to speak with them and find out more, not knowing what to expect.

So I called home, and I phoned home.... I don't even remember who picked up the phone, but I could just hear my mom and I could hear my mom and my dad crying and letting out this like, umm, this wail, and, and this weeping, and like, it was the sound of agony on the other side of the phone, and I knew right away what happened, because of that dream that I had, and then I remember somebody saying that Beth died, and then, my dad came on the phone and he said that's what happened. (*clear throat) And when he told ... and then I told him I said that I had a dream that she died, and then he got mad at me, because I didn't tell him that dream. So like, that hurt a lot, it seemed like it was my fault.

The significance of dreams is an integral part of Indigenous ways of knowing, culture, and spirituality. I have had the honour of hearing various teachings on dreams throughout my life, as I, too, have been gifted the “sight to see,” as I have heard it called. I was told that dreams are a place in which the spirit world is connecting with the individuals within the Earth realm and bringing important messages to them. These understandings have been disputed as superstition or phenomenon, as scientists have been unable to quantify them and find the cause of dreams. However, it has been found that the REM state is a state in which a person is in a hyper state of awareness. Many research studies have found that individuals are in a state of awareness that they may be more susceptible and available to accept and receive messages that may be sent by the spirit world. Blair Stonechild (2020), who has done extensive research on Indigenous spirituality and Indigenous ways of knowing, attested that there is a connection between dreams, spirituality, and “knowing.” However, it is challenging to work in alignment with Western sciences. Stonechild said,

Claims that there is psychic potential in dreams are invariably denied by experiments that fail to replicate results.... It is a conundrum that no experimental model appears capable of capturing psychic phenomena. Even if a legitimate event were to occur, skeptics would come up with a way to explain it away. (pp. 231–232)

I carry teachings on dreams that say women have a special connection to the spirit world. This connection is a gift, which gives them the power to be the portal between Earth and the spirit world in order to bring new life and babies from that place. Due to this spiritual ability, seen as a gift shared with them by Creator, they possess something that gives them the ability to be susceptible to “having sight to see” or predicting future events, through the messages sent by the spirit world. Western science has deemed this practice as superstition and irrational, as it

cannot be quantified. However, through oral traditions and the teachings relayed by Knowledge Keepers and Elders, this practice is extremely common and is looked at as a gift given to certain people who are ready and able to receive these messages. Stonechild (2020) argued that psychologist Carl Jung theorizes an external collective consciousness within the human psych that is connected to a more fundamental reality. This theory can be used to describe many of the spiritual understanding of Indigenous Peoples, as Indigenous Ways of Knowing have the understanding that everything is connected by spirit, ultimately consciousness. Through a different level of consciousness, Lorraine was sent a message in her dreams to warn her about what was going to happen in the near future to her sister.

As she continued her story, Lorraine described her feelings of pain and anguish from the loss of her older sister Leeann: “I remember just crying that whole weekend and trying to figure out how to get home from Gillam.” She described in detail how her family was lucky enough to win money to return home to (her reserve) to meet with her family so they could drive down to Brandon together and support one another through the next few days of events. She cleared her throat before continuing and recalled the events as “a very emotional time,” having to sift through her sister’s belongings and pack them up, while also picking up and caring for her sister’s very small three children. She described how a journalist from the newspaper had found her sister’s address and had come by wanting to interview her family, intruding while they were packing up her home and belongings. She recounted, “My dad was straight up with them and told them, the RCMP are racist, what they did to my daughter, how come they, couldn’t they help her in a way. Even afterwards, she was still alive... that night.” Lorraine continued to describe her family’s dissatisfaction with the police and the lack of communication and contact they had with them after the fatal night her sister was killed: “I don’t remember seeing any of the police at, at my sister’s place to, just to, investigate. I don’t remember seeing, remember any contact with them, when we went to Brandon.” At this time, I inquired to Lorraine if she had any contact with the Brandon police immediately following the death of her sister, and she responded that she and her family did not have any contact with them while they were in Brandon retrieving Leeann’s items from her home, and it was predominantly her family who had come together to be there for one another.

She distinctly recollected the *Brandon Sun* interviewing her family about her sister’s murder. She spoke at length about how her sister Leeann was described by the reporter, once the

article was released in the newspaper. She noted that the article stated, “What was she (Leeann) doing out partying when she has three kids at home?” Lorraine continued in her dismay at the representation of her sister by the media:

She was practically a single mom, raising those three kids on her own. No family in Brandon and, and, like, her boyfriend was, absent most of the time... so, she had little support. So, so that’s the way, she was able to go out that night, because, like ummm, the dad’s sister was, you know, she gave her a break to go out and to, to just to, just enjoy herself and to socialize and but they misrepresented her. What if she was a white woman? They wouldn’t have talked about her like that if she was a white woman. They would have respected her, as, as a woman.

Lorraine stressed that the media should not have “misrepresented her in the newspaper.” She lamented,

It’s just really hard ... because she was my sister, and she was like an individual. She could have been like anybody else’s sister, even if she was Indigenous or not, but people should be able to respect other people’s lives, no matter of the colour of their skin.

As noted within the literature review, the issue of misrepresentation is one that needs to be addressed in regard to MMIWG2S. This is an ongoing problem that has created a damaging narrative and victim blaming mentality in regard to missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two Spirit people.

Lorraine continued to describe how her family had come together to support each other during the days following her sister’s murder. She noted that her mother had been the one to say, “‘Okay we’re going to bring them home, the kids home and we’re going to raise them back home in Grand Rapids.’ So that’s what she’s done. So that’s what she’s doing today, still, is raising them.” She further described her niece:

But now, like, her daughter is, like, 16 years old and, like, she wants to bond with her dad and her dad is, like, I don’t trust him, because he’s a known drug dealer and, and I never liked him, because he, he used to abuse my sister, and she would come home, she would come home with bruises and black eyes and her face like really bruised, and I hated him for that, and I hated guys, and my sisters were abused by their boyfriends like that and I just hated them so much.

We discussed how she felt that those experiences impacted what eventually happened to Leeann. She described how her family had always asked her to come home, and they had no idea if her boyfriend was controlling or manipulating her to stay away from the family. “We only seen physically of what he would do to her. but she never really talked about it.” As within many

instances of violence against women and abusive relationships, it is very common for the aggressor to isolate the victim from support systems and family, as it is then easier for the aggressor to manipulate and victimize their victim.

Statistics show that a large percentage of Aboriginal women have experienced situations of violence within intimate partner violence:

Aboriginal people (9%) were more than twice as likely as non-Aboriginal people (4%) to report experiencing spousal violence in the previous five years; . . . Aboriginal women (10%) were more likely to be victimized by current or former partners, compared to non-Aboriginal women (3%); . . . Aboriginal 25 people more often reported having experienced abuse as children . . . [allowing a connection to be drawn between childhood experienced trauma and adult experienced spousal abuse; and] while rates of self-reported spousal victimization among the non-Aboriginal population decreased between 2009 (6%) and 2014 (4%), rates for Aboriginal people were virtually unchanged from 2009 (10%) to 2014 (9%). (Statistics Canada, 2016, p. 3)

Lorraine moved on further to describe how her sister may have talked about the abuse with her sisters or talked about it with their mom: “Because my mom, would sit down and talk to us when she sees something wrong. She would sit down and talk to us. So most likely my mom did talk to her about it.” Lorraine looked down and continued,

It was really, like, really hard to lose, umm, my sister and now like her daughter... Sometimes she cries and she says it's really hard not having a mom and it's really and having a dad who is hardly there. So, [Lorraine *sighs] I think she is trying, I guess, to find the roots of where her mom was right now. That's why she wants to go bond with her dad in Portage la Prairie.

She described how these feelings of loss continued to impact their family and how she herself had unanswered questions. She revealed that she went to Brandon and tried living there for a while just to see who her sister was to the people out there:

“Did she have friends? I want to meet them... I want to see what happened. I want to go to the place where that happened . . . and I did, and I met people that she knew, that knew her, but that didn't really help me much because I wasn't, I wasn't in a good place.

As she cleared her throat, Lorraine opened up to describe in detail the events that led to her sister's death:

She was talking to a guy in that vehicle, and then when, when that vehicle tried to pull away, really fast from the parking lot, and her head was like kind of in the vehicle and then she was, they pulled away fast, when she was, like, half of her body was still in the vehicle, and they tried to take off, and she must have fell, fell from the vehicle, and then and then she, they ran over her from the scene. So, like, they, she went under the vehicle,

and she got run over, and that guy was trying to take off, but one of those bouncers outside, they, they held onto that.... I don't know what happened, but that guy was able to hold, that guy, until the police showed up.

She continued to describe the investigation and how she felt about how it was handled by the police:

Well they said that they had like cameras outside that place, outside that bar, and I heard of something, I heard that they did have cameras, but then, umm, like, the police, they, they ... there was not even, no relationship with the family and the police. Like, they just told us that ... there is somebody that they caught. They didn't catch him, they umm, the bouncer at that bar caught him. If that bouncer didn't catch him or hold him until police showed up, then would, they, would they have made an effort to even find the vehicle? To find the guy that done that? But, I'm glad that, you know, that bouncer did hold him down until the police showed up.

Lorraine continued to express her uncertainty about the facts and the discomfort she felt with the lack of information relayed to her family from the police: "If it even, if it happened that way." At this point, thunder rolled in the distance, and it interrupted her and stressed the point she was trying to make. She turned to me and expressed how her uncertainty in the relayed facts, word of mouth, wasn't sufficient for her. Although she listened to what little had been told to her, "I wanted to know for myself what actually happened. Did it happen that way? . . . Was it true?" She continued to relay that this information was relayed to her from individuals in Brandon. She described how she had met people from Brandon that had been at the bar that night and did see what happened: "They said that they were there that night and, like, the way that they said it that happen it's the same, it's the same facts of, of what people were telling us, by witnesses." She felt that the information relayed from those individuals was far more important to her than the police because she felt that the police had just said, "Oh, we found the guy and we're charging him, and he's in jail right now, and that was it." She felt that there should have been more done by the police and that there was something missing. She further described how the person responsible for the death of her sister was only charged with manslaughter and not murder: "So that guy, that guy got 18 or 19 months in jail, but he must have got out earlier than that."

At this moment, I am reminded about the justice failures that continue to plague Indigenous Peoples throughout Canada. Indigenous Peoples are over-represented within the criminal justice system, making up only approximately 5% of the total population in Canada, yet

within the Prairie Provinces, Indigenous People make up nearly 55% of the prison population and over 30% of the overall population throughout Canada (Cecco, 2020). Yet, the individuals who are perpetuating violent acts against Indigenous Peoples are seemingly getting away with violent crimes and murders without any repercussions or punishments that fit the crimes. The mishandling of the Cindy Gladue case was discussed earlier in this paper, and it is a prime example of the justice system failing Indigenous women and allowing their murderers to walk free. After a decade-long fight with the justice system by family and advocates, Cindy Gladue's murderer was only found guilty of manslaughter. It has been argued that he should have been charged with murder, rather than manslaughter, which judges it was not intentional, even though it was proven that he did in fact inflict the long wound that killed her (Baig, 2021). The justice system in Canada has been described as the injustice system by some Indigenous rights activists.

As she digs further into Leeann's story, Lorraine described how, through her own personal search for truth, she was unable to meet the bouncer who helped to bring her sister's murderer to justice:

I didn't get to meet him [the bouncer] but my mom and them did go to court to go and face the guy, that, that killed her... They asked me if I wanted to go, and I said no. "No, I don't want to, I don't want to see the guy who killed my sister. I don't want." ... Cus I wasn't in a good place. I didn't, I didn't want to stir up all those, those ... emotions.

She looked down at her hands and went silent. I could only think about how hard this must have been on her and her family. Being personally affected, facing many of the same circumstances, I felt a strong sense of connection to her and deeply understood her emotions and feelings of loss.

Naturally, I asked about the offer of victim services, after-support, and counselling, as well as if their family was offered anything in regard to police and policing actions, after the fact, knowing that her sister was a victim of a crime. Lorraine revealed to me that she did not recall her mother mentioning anything about it, as well as the fact that she specifically did not get counselling for the trauma that was inflicted on her and her family due to the murder of her sister. Families of MMIWG2S have shared that they have suffered from PTSD, anxiety, and depression following the deaths and disappearances of their loved ones. She did, however, reveal to me the inner healing work that her family has undertaken in the wake of their tragic experience: "It was my mom who was able to help us heal through it all. She was a praying mom ... When my sister passed away, my dad went downhill, cus he blamed God for it." As the words

left her lips, a very loud burst of thunder rumbled in the distance, as if the thunderbirds were signaling the significance of these actions.

But with my mom she, umm, she held on. She held her faith, and she, she continued to pray, and she continued to pray with us and to also mentor us, as well. So and to teach us, and she said and when she said, she meant they went to court and that guy was asked if he had anything to say to the family, and he apologized, and he looked directly at my mom and asked for forgiveness, and she accepted it. She accepted his forgiveness, and she said that to us. She said that to me that I'm able to forgive the guy who killed her because I know who he is, because I know how he looks, and he looked at me right in the eyes, and he said that he was sorry with tears in his eyes. She felt that it was sincere, and she was able to heal from that because she was able to forgive, and if she was able to forgive, then I was able to forgive him.

Lorraine let out a painful sigh,

It's, it's still painful to think about the time that when she, she left and but I'm able to talk, and ... I'm able to forgive the guy that stole our sister away... That killed my sister and, and, I'm able to heal and I'm able to live, live on and, and to talk about it and, and I still want people to know who she was, and to know ... what kind of life she had."

I find this is what so many individuals who have been impacted by MMIWG2S want for their loved ones. Acknowledgement. Humanization. An inside look at how these people were loved; they were cared for by us. They were people, they were sisters, mothers, daughters, aunties, friends, partners, but most of all, they were someone.

Lorraine revealed aspects of her sister Leeann's life and who she was. She described in detail many of the things that she looked up to in her big sister:

She was a really good artist, she really, really, was educated, and she was good in school too. She was, her, she was the valedictorian when she graduated high school, and so she led a good example. . . . When she graduated, I wanted to graduate, and even when she would take me on walks, she would explain what, what different each cloud was called. So she knew what they were about and what they, what kind of clouds, what kind of cloud that was and what kind of cloud, what it does. She was able to explain those kind of things to me as a kid. So she still has some of her art that hangs up at my mom's house... and now her daughter is a good artist. She is amazing, and she has that talent. I don't know where she got that talent from because there's not that many painting artists in our family, but she had that gift.... Her daughter has that gift now.

Lorraine cleared her throat, and after a brief pause, she continued:

So I was able to heal from that, heal from losing a sister.... As long as you know who killed your sibling. You know who killed your loved one. They ask for forgiveness, you're able to heal. That's how we were able to heal, but if you don't know who killed your sibling and if you don't know where your sibling is at, or like, if someone killed

your sibling or your loved one and someone is murdering your family and you don't know who killed them, is one of the most hardest things that someone could experience, because I have another sibling that was murdered too, and that's even more difficult to even talk about because those wounds are still open.

Lorraine revealed that her brother was also murdered in 1999:

He got badly beaten by, they say, three to four guys, and only one of the guys went to jail for second-degree. So that is another whole story that I could talk about.... I know those people and they deny it still.

It is evident that the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous men is becoming a widespread problem and is exceeding the statistics on MMIWG2S. Families made pleas to the national inquiry to include the murders and disappearances of men, but they were disregarded. The issue was seen as too great of an undertaking to explore concurrently with the MMIWG2S inquiry. There are distinct correlations between the issues that have created the problem of MMIWG2S and the disappearances and murders of Indigenous men and boys (Hansen & Dim, 2019). As she looked down at her hands, she continued by saying, "Yeah, but with my sister's, it's not, it's not as heavy now, because we were able to heal from that."

Reflecting on what she had just shared with me, I felt compelled to share with her certain details of the death of my mother.

There was no investigation. Police didn't do anything.... Even the acknowledgement of my mother's life, like, they didn't even acknowledge her life. There was no investigation; they didn't ask the neighbours, they didn't do anything, they did nothing,... and it's hard. It's hard to heal from something, that when you don't have answers and that's one of the things for me. I feel grateful that I know where my mom is buried, there's a place that I can go, there's a place I can go to place and bring flowers, and I know where she is right. But there's so many people out there that don't even have that right, and I can't really compare; there's no comparison and stories because it's, they're all so different and everybody's on their own journey, their own way, of, of healing.

There are stages to healing, and although healing is not linear, many people need to find answers or closure in order to get to the next stage in their own grief and healing. I explained to Lorraine,

When you went to Brandon (to seek out people and to get answers). I went to FIPPA, I got the police reports. I have the medical examiner reports. I, I searched. It's like a search for answers, right? Like, you want something, that's, you know, your loved one. That's the person that you love. The person that you care for, they're not gone, they're still there, still here with us right.

I feel that the people whom we have lost are our motivation. The actions we have taken to heal, as well as work towards addressing solutions to help other families to not have to go through what we have and support those who are also impacted, is what drives collective actions taken in memory of our loved ones. I revealed to Lorraine that I had explored including men's stories in this work due to the numerous people impacted, but found through preliminary research that the issue itself was too large. Lorraine expressed, "There's so many issues that are, are happening. Even to our women, or even the young women that are in CFS." We agreed that the complexities and overlapping connections are great.

Lorraine revealed to me how she wants to celebrate her sister's life:

You know like, ummm, like the way some people, like some people heal. Cus people heal so differently.... I wanted to continue to talk about, like, some of the issues that she went through ... with life, and I wanted to see what, like, what did everybody else.

She is still seeking answers and wants to remember her sister, regardless of a story being good or bad. She expressed that she wants to speak with people who knew her sister and ask them,

How do you remember my sister and what and what, umm, what memories does she leave behind, with you. Even if it's like a good or bad ... because, I want to know it all. I want to know more about her. Umm, because you know not a 24-7 Angel sometimes, we stay or do things that hurt people, and I still wanted to know those things and I wanted to know her characteristics.

Her search for truth and connection is much like my own search for answers, justice, and healing. In remembering our loved ones, we can heal. We can honour their names, their stories, and who they were as people and individuals.

Lorraine described in detail the year she remembers her sister taking a dark turn. This was a significant turning point in her memory.

In 1992, we lived here in Winnipeg, from, we moved in because my mom wanted to attend school, but that didn't happen because she was umm, she was introduced to like people from, you know, the streets. So, she hung around the wrong crowd and that, if, she was protective of our family. She was also violent too, and she would have hit people with anything and, and, and, it didn't matter, if, if, it was something like a hammer (*laughs) or something like that. She would, she, she, lived also, like, a kind of, like, a risky lifestyle too and I think, I think at the age of 14, that's when she, she ran away, and we were living here in Winnipeg, and, and, umm, and I guess, she used to, like, take off all the time and my mom said that she, she, went to, she went to CFS and complained. I think it was to the cops, and then CFS got involved, and she, she all of us ended up in the CFS system.... So, we were all taken away from my mom and dad for, like, maybe two

or three months here in Winnipeg. I think we went to three different home foster homes that time, and so I don't know where she was.

She reflected back on this experience. She felt that it was tied to her sister's untimely demise.

But I think she must have run away and took off, but I don't know if my sister was abused? But I did hear stories that she was, like, when she would drink and I think she was even raped too and, and, then going into a (bad) relationship.

She continued by saying,

I think it's the choices that she made reflect on what how she felt, her self-worth was and she probably wasn't taught that cus she's worth more than rubies ... worth anything in the world. She was my world, and I loved her so much and it just like tore me apart when she left. When she died.

Her admission is very much like many of the families and loved ones of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and Two-Spirit people within Canada. The connection between the CFS system and missing and murdered girls is staggering. There has been extensive research conducted on the child welfare system, childhood trauma, and violence against women. Much of the cycles of violence began through the impacts of the residential school systems that were followed by the 60s Scoop and the apprehension of children into the child welfare system, often referred to as the millennium scoop (Paradis, 2015). There are distinct and definite connections between the disappearances and murder of Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people and their upbringings and experience within the colonial state-run childcare system.

As the rain continues to fall, Lorraine looked out the window and then down at her hands. I could feel that she was going to share something important with me.

My partner at the time, I guess. I ended up having to go back to Gillam because he was working, and he said that and he said that he woke up one night, and he said that he seen her in a blue dress... and she said in his dream, she said, I don't know if it was dream or a vision? But he says, when, when I sat up and she was standing there she said, "Tell her that I'm okay," and then, and he woke up and told me that he had that dream or vision. That he seen her in this really nice blue dress, and that she had a, and she had a light blue dress on her grad. Yeah, so I believe that she's okay and that she was able to, like, take her last breath. Before she took her last breath, I believe that she was able to call on God, call on the Word. To you know, like, forgive her for everything that she had done in life and to accept Him so that she could make Heaven her home.

I find her faith to be admirable. The genocide of Indigenous women and girls leaves little to be positive and hopeful for in the wake of the tragic loss of loved ones, for so many of us left reeling in the wake of the crisis of MMIWG2S and it's destruction. Yet, her faith in the Creator

and the messages sent to her through her partner again come as a spiritual reminder of our connection to the cosmos and the way we see, think, be, and do things with our time here on earth. There is a spiritual significance that has been revealed within each of these stories; there have been significant happenings leading into each of the loved one's deaths or disappearances. In trying to better understand Indigenous ways of knowing and this deep spiritual connection, it has been described as part of one's healing journey, which also uncovers how one investigates a deeper meaning of life. The ability to dream is a medicine gift that is considered special and should be taken care of; the persistent exercise and belief in one's gift guarantees a healthy society (Stonechild, 2020).

Lorraine continued by stating,

I believe that she is in a good place, and sometimes when I see people in the community, I see her in people, and then, and then, it kind of reminds me of like who she is, and it gives me like a sense of strength that, that I'm able to see, that, and that I'm able to be reminded of who she is and who she was.

She looked out the window at the stormy skies and the rain pouring down and hitting the window: "The one she left behind for us and when I see her daughter, she looks exactly like her, so it was almost just, like, we didn't lose her, because we have her daughter who looks exactly like her and, and that's a blessing that, that she left behind with us her kids." Lorraine looked down at her hands, stopped speaking, and there was a long pause. This moment was filled with strong emotions, and the air was thick with grief.

At this point, I delved deeper into her story, and I asked Lorraine to explain to me why her family had not participated within the National Inquiry into MMIWG2S. She replied,

I think it was because my family didn't really talk about it and say like, "Hey, we should be involved."... I think, that was one of the main reasons that we, umm, umm, we weren't guided.... Umm, I know that there was a call for that, but it was, it was just no one said anything.

This was a common narrative within the responses I have heard from others, including myself, who had not been involved with the inquiry. The lack of support or someone who had physically reached out to the families was an underlying factor in them not participating. Lorraine continued by explaining that there was also not a collective push from her family to be involved:

No family collective push for us to, "Hey let's say something." Let's ... but, I know that if I wanted to share something that, I would have to talk to, like, one of my family members

about it before I even do something. So, like, with like, I always have to let them know what's going on before, like, I get involved or something.

She revealed that she had even asked for “permission” from her mother and family to be involved in this work:

I told, like, my mom and my sister, like, about what was going on, and like, what I wanted to talk about. Umm, it's just like, maybe I'm not the only family that has been impacted by like the murders and the violence, because there is other families that just don't even say anything.... That don't even talk about it. That don't know how to talk about it, because they're still drowning in drugs and alcohol and that, they don't have anybody to guide them or to encourage them to be involved in something, because they don't know how to reach out. They don't even know who to talk to or even if it's, if they do know who to talk to, like, how do you approach people. How do you tell them?

Lorraine expressed how it is challenging for her to open up and say, “Hey, I come from a family that was impacted by this.” So, she can understand and empathize with the families who are unable to come forward, the other families who may not have had the support and guidance to be involved in the inquiry, as well as those who are still stuck in the negative cycles of addictions and abuses that continue to plague Indigenous Peoples throughout Canada due to the impacts of colonialism. She voiced her collective challenges within her church and balancing Indigenous culture, identity, and spiritual practices, as well as how she is on her own healing journey through finding her own way: “Just by reaching out, I think that's, like, one step, and sometimes that one step could take, like, maybe two years or something.”

Lorraine explained how she has so many questions still lingering in her mind and things she doesn't have the answers to: “How did the police take it? How did the police even investigate it? I don't even know those kinds of things about my sister, like, what happened and how they approached it? And like, I don't even know? I don't even know her.” Lorraine trailed off and went quiet, so I ask her if she wished she had more communication and heard more from the police or answers? She replied,

Yeah, but nothing? There is no like relationship, there is no involvement, and like, like they could they could have they could have did something like or wait for us or contact us and, and say let us know when you come to Brandon, so that we can talk to you. So that we could, so we could like, just verify what happened or like and let you know what we've been investigating. So, like, there was no support at all.

We discussed the challenges faced by the families impacted and how everyone's stories look different, yet are similar. The tremendous lack of support is a big factor in our grief,

healing, and seeking supports through other means. “Yeah. So now you, so that’s why I like, always say, you got to wake up and say I’m going to do something with my life today.” I reflected on something significant that was shared with us that day on the land with the Elder:

I felt that, when we were on the land there, with the Elder, and I totally felt that because people do get addicted to the things that they do, whether it’s positive or negative, and that’s the same way that I think about ceremony, the same way that addictions are insidious.... It creeps in and ... people do it a little bit more, a little bit more, a little bit more, a little bit more until they’re so deep within it that they don’t even realize how they got there, and that’s the same way that I think of ceremony and, and positive things. The good things that you do, you do a little bit, and then you do a little bit more, and you do a little bit more, and then you realize that you’re walking through these doors that you prayed to walk through, that you’re doing it. That things that you want.... It creeps up on you to where you want to be, and it’s just a little bit at a time.

This reflection was something that we both continued to talk about in greater detail. Lorraine suggested it was like a “good path.” She remarked, “It’s pretty amazing.... When you trust God or Creator and just continue to trust him and to continue to pray, because there’s, there’s so much work to be done and even if even if no one believes you.” Lorraine let out a cheerful laugh, “Even if somebody doesn’t like, umm, agree with you. But you still got to keep going. Ummm, cus there’s people right behind you and you have to plow through it. So that’s the way that I see it and it’s just and doors do open when you do good things, for people.” Yet we also reflected on bad things happening to good people as well. Lorraine described it as “the Sun Shines on the good and the bad.” As she spoke, thunder rumbled in the distance, we talked about how these bad things sometimes happen for a reason, and yet, we still keep going, we keep being optimistic, we don’t let the bad things that happen to us, turn us into bad people.

As the thunder sounds again in the distance, remarking on how blessed we both are to be doing what we are doing, I tell Lorraine, “I’m happy, I’m doing good. Yeah, I went through this bad storm, just like the way it is right now, it’s storming, sun’s gonna shine tomorrow.”

I am reminded of a teaching that is often relayed through ceremony and within many different circles. “*Mino pimatisiwin*” in the Cree language or “*Mino Biimaadizawin*” in Anishinaabe is loosely translated into “the good life.” This understanding and teaching is important, as there is no one, clear-cut understanding of this, unlike Western ideologies that can be explained and defined. *Mino pimatisiwin* means living your life in a good way, but in the way you make your life to be. Many have discussed that this understanding means to live drug and alcohol free, being positive at all times, and attending ceremony on a regular basis. However, my

understanding is that each individual on earth can live their “good life” in the way that they choose, as that is the greatest gift given to us all: free will and the power to choose how we want to live our lives. When speaking with Lorraine, my mind travels to this understanding, and I feel that if only more people understood this teaching, there may be better choices made, people would be kinder, atrocities would cease to exist, and problems would be collectively solved. As Michael Hart (2002), a social worker, from Fisher River Cree Nation, explained in his book *Seeking Mino-Pimatisiwin: An Aboriginal approach to helping*, “Mino Pimatisiwin” is something to pursue. Encompassing the use of traditional Indigenous ways of knowing, respect, and reciprocity can help to bring about a sense of balance, interconnectedness, wholeness, and emergence of “the good life” (p. 44).

Lorraine spoke at length with pride and excitement of the work she does with youth: “I mean, that’s what I teach my youth.” She works as a program coordinator for youth aged 15-30:

I love my job. Like my youth, they challenged me,... but that’s and there’s, like, greater, greater rewards than the stressful times that I go through with a youth.... It’s so beautiful. When you see them in the community and they’re doing the work that you’ve ... inspired them to do, it lifts me up.

I responded to her by saying,

I want to keep doing it because you see them happy and that makes you happy, and it helps, it helps.... It helps the community be happy. It’s like, win, win, win. I feel, that’s why I do the work that I do because it’s hard to work, it makes you feel good.”

Lorraine finishes this with, “And that’s medicine.”

I am reminded of the word “*nete*” in Ininimowin, which means heart. This was something discussed by me and Angel and also in Daniel’s story; heart work is an important aspect of the work being done in the Indigenous community. I relay this understanding to Lorraine. I am reminded of what should have been my first language, Ininimowin, and how my thinking, being, doing, seeing, and understanding have been shifted to encompass the language. My thoughts are often filtered through what I believe to be a decolonial lens, as I shift into further strengthening my knowledge of the language, as well as my own culture and identity, as I continue on my own healing path, sharing with others what I have learned and understand. We discussed this aspect of our identity, as we are both Swampy Cree, and I ask Lorraine if her family have fluent speakers, to which she replied, “Yeah, (my mom) speaks Cree but, umm, she never taught us, umm, because my, my dad said if we teach them Cree, they wouldn’t understand anything in

school, and they'd fall behind. So, they didn't teach us Cree." Lorraine continued to describe in detail how she felt that there was something missing from her experience in school, rather not just language, but a sense of identity and cultural awareness that is only recently being integrated into the school system:

And then that sucked, because no one spoke Cree in school that time... When I was growing up . . . the grades behind me were getting taught Cree, and I was like tsss, how come I didn't get taught Cree? And like, the only time that I was able to even go and pick sweet grass was like Native Studies. How come I wasn't taught to go and pick sweet grass with my mom and dad, and like, or like, how come I wasn't taught to pick medicine? So now I do it. I do it with my kids, and my son wants to drum. So I'm going to give him a drum.... I don't care like if people, Christian people or backlash me, or ridicule me because that.

I pondered her admission and responded with how I feel this needs to come full circle. The effects of residential school were extremely damaging, and Indigenous people are still feeling the effects. In order "to make amends for residential schools ... [Religion] teaches the same things that [Indigenous ways of knowing] teaches, which is be kind, don't judge your neighbour, be kind to them, and how can you..." As the words are leaving my lips, thunder rolls in the distance as if to signify the importance of the words I am speaking, "fault somebody for practicing who they are, right? It doesn't, it's almost, it's contrary to ... their belief system, or what their preaching system is right?" Lorraine agreed and revealed how welcoming her church is to Indigenous culture. "So, like, at my, the church that I go to, we wear our skirts. We're allowed to wear, like, and express who we are. And we're even allowed to bring in the drum and to sing too." Lorraine attended "The Launching Place" and explained how the attendees gave the minister

a lot of back-lash from a lot of us because [of] our spirits and representing Indigenous People ... Cus God didn't create us to deny us, who we are.... I embraced it, so like, wherever I go, even when I go back home because people don't expect me to wear a traditional skirt.

She was inexplicably interrupted by the sound of thunder rumbling in the distance, and I took this opportunity to respond to Lorraine by asking her, "Do you feel like that has impacted your healing process, Christianity? Your, your understanding, those ways of knowing, with regard to religion?" Lorraine replied,

So yeah, like, I went to school, and I learned a lot about like, different religions, around the world, and umm, even through the healing process. I hit the way I'm able to heal and

pray and get over addictions and bad addictions. I was able to like, you know, like find my savior which is Jesus, and to have a relationship and to know that relationship with God, and that's my own personal relationship. That's my choice and, and finding time to go in the room and cry and pray, and that's my way of healing. I was able to heal through the trauma I went through as a child, as a teenager.

As Lorraine spoke so candidly about her own source of healing and faith within Christianity, I was reminded of our beautiful way of life as Indigenous People and the ways in which we participate in ceremony. There are so many similarities between religion and ceremony, which has often been described as the reasoning behind why Indigenous People were so easily converted to religions by the missionaries within first contact. The sweat lodge ceremony is the place in which you connect with your ancestors, grandfathers and grandmothers, and the people who have left to the spirit world before us all on earth. I described to Lorraine how the sweat lodge is the place to go to, to cry and to pray, much like how Christians enter a church on Sundays. As I told Lorraine about the sweat lodge, a burst of thunder could be heard loudly in the distance—the thunderbirds, signaling their agreement of my relaying this information to her. Lorraine continued to describe her faith and understandings of her own identity and Indigenous People's way of life by sharing,

Even losing loved ones, I would have to take my time and pray and also when I went to school too. I was taught not to disrespect everybody, and even with my mom too, she told me you always got to respect somebody, and she has friends that are traditionalists to and Christians like we ... like me. I feel I have, I have a handful of Christian friends. Just a handful, but the majority of my other friends are traditional and that way, and I feel like there's a connection with both beliefs that I am taking on, that I want to learn because I want to my own, learn my own ways of healing, and my ways of healing can be different than somebody else's, and that's okay, and that's as long as we're healing together.

Lorraine looked down and paused as thunder rolled in the distance. She continued,

That's the way I was able to heal and also to have my husband too. I had him as my support system because before, even before, before I met this guy. I was traumatized like, umm, witnessing the abuse that would happen to my sisters. Where I hated men. I didn't like them, I looked at them as something to waste time with.... I just pray, I just pray that I would get somebody that would connect to me and connect with me emotionally, spiritually, physically, and that was to serve the Lord with me and also tall and handsome, and that's all I need.

Lorraine let out a joyful laugh as she recalled how she connected with her main source of support. She once again revealed to me that there was a significant dream that connected her to

her husband before she met him. I ask her if she has sought out the knowledge from an Elder about her dreams, as I feel this is an important gift. Lorraine responded,

It's like, I can interpret them right away when I wake up and then I go and I tell my mom and she tells me the same thing that I can interpret what they mean. Yeah, so like, I'm able to, I'm able to interpret my own dreams and even interprets of other people dreams, but for sure my dreams too.

She revealed that she has had many different dreams throughout the years, about different people, situations, and happenings. An important teaching that she finished her story with was: "I have to show ... that love and kindness to [everyone], even though there is that negative spirit. So, because my words can speak life and death. So, I always have to watch what I say." Lorraine's words are powerful and resonated with me. It is the hope that these stories will speak life to help find the solutions to this crisis.

The data collection portion was completed in the late afternoon, at approximately 4 p.m. The rain was still pouring down on us outside of my vehicle. Lorraine inquired about my master's program and how she may find information to apply too. I relayed to her that she should research some programs and thought she should definitely think about joining the circle, as Indigenous females are much needed within graduate programs. I offered her my support and help if she would be needing any. I noted that it is my pleasure to share my knowledge with her and that empowered women empower women, reflecting on the words Angel had previously shared with me. Ultimately, this has been a conversation that we have spoken about long after the story collection portion of our work together. I have been relayed a teaching by a fluent Ininimowin teacher, which comes to mind what I feel encompasses this English saying. "Kawicihēcik iskwewak," which loosely translates to "the women that help."

Honouring Tracy

Daniel, a Salteaux and Cree father and community worker who is from 2 First Nation communities in Manitoba, works as an action therapist and does a significant counselling work with individuals facing grief. Daniel is a father to his young son and an active participant in the collective healing of the Indigenous community throughout Winnipeg, Manitoba, where he partners with different Indigenous organizations. He shared his story of his ex-wife, her life, and the circumstances surrounding her disappearance.

His choice to not participate within the National Inquiry into MMIWG2S stemmed from the feelings of loss attributed to Tracy's disappearance. Although he saw the process as an important step toward addressing the problem of MMIWG2S, ultimately, he did not want to be involved because "it would not bring her back." Daniel shared the story of his loved one, Tracy, who is still missing.

I drove out to Saint George, Manitoba, on July 19, 2020, arriving at approximately 10 a.m. I was warmly greeted by Daniel and welcomed inside where I met his mother and father. We immediately left the house to go outside to a gazebo that was situated just outside of their residence. I observed that their home was encircled by forest, and what I would recognize as a healing place because the tree line to the forest was so close, and I could hear the still quietness of nature. The gazebo sat on a large rock reminding me of the Canadian Shield. We discussed formalities, and Daniel read over the consent forms and signed them. He quickly jumped right in and began talking to me about his son as well as his ex-wife Tracy. He explained to me how they had met in their twenties and that she was living here in Manitoba from Alberta, during which time their relationship carried on to the point where they got married. Shortly after this time, they moved to Alberta, where they had their son. He stated that their relationship was fairly good for the most part; however, during this time Tracy had wanted to drink wine, which was something that she had not done often. He explained, from the age of 16 to 26, Daniel had not been a drinker; however, during this time he began to drink wine with her on the weekends. He reflects on this period of time as recognizing that this was almost like "the floodgates" had opened. He expressed that at this point, her drinking escalated, which put quite a strain on their relationship. He did not talk at length about what it was that had caused their relationship breakdown, but expressed that things were not going well. Daniel mentioned that there were some negative things attached or connected to Tracy being at home with her family, which he discussed in more detail later within his storytelling, and he began to talk about his choices to be back home in Manitoba. He had wanted to move back to Manitoba to be with family, but there were custodial issues regarding their son, which he noted that due to Tracy beginning to backslide into addiction, alcohol use, and drug use, that she had given him verbal consent to take their son back to Manitoba. He expressed that they both agreed that she was not in a great place to be mothering him at that point.

Daniel spoke of February 2015 being the time period that Tracy had gone missing. He had received a phone call from her family asking him if he had spoken to her. We took a quick break at this point and went inside, and when we came back outside to the gazebo, I prepared a smudge, and we cleansed our minds, bodies, and spirits with the smoke to begin the data collection process in a good way. Daniel recalled that during the period that Tracy had gone missing, it had been established that it didn't seem out of the ordinary for her not to call or make contact for a few weeks. However, he relayed, "What was out of the ordinary was her sister calling and asking me if I had heard from her. So, her sister being concerned made me concerned." During this period of time, Tracy was living with her family in their home community in Alberta. Daniel described the community as apparently being "one little break-off community from Sitting Bull's People way back when." He fondly recalled memories of Tracy being "a special woman" who had just finished her Masters in 2011 and had aspirations to continue her work through a PhD program and had already discussed things with an advisor. This revealed to me that the problem of MMIWG2S does not discriminate. Any woman, girl, or Two-Spirit person can be a victim of this heinous problem, regardless of circumstances, life choices, or situations people are placed in.

Daniel continued to uncover how the disappearance of Tracy took place and described in detail his thoughts from when he spoke with Tracy's sister in the early days of her disappearance. He expressed,

It was concerning to hear from her sister that she was concerned.... So, I don't know, couple weeks went by, and uhhh, another week, and then another week. I don't know at what point you kind of realize someone's actually gone missing, missing, but it just, it was like a slow realization. Ummm, yeah, and then the months go by, and then you're like, "Holy shit!?"

At this moment, he sat quietly and looked out towards the trees. I sensed that his mind was being brought back to those early moments in her disappearance, and he was filled with emotion.

Daniel quickly switched gears and revealed that he and his mother attended a special ceremony that summer to find clarity with Tracy's disappearance:

We went to ceremony to go offer ... ask questions at a Yuwipi or tie up. I don't know if you've ever been to one, and the spirits and their mystical way kind of alluded to things, you know. They don't ever say clearly, what's up. but they'll just be, you'll just have to wait, and it's, it's really, really sad. F*** thanks.

Daniel laughed uncomfortably, as this showed his disappointment in the lack of answers within the holding of this ceremony. Yuwipi ceremonies are carried out by a medicine person who is wrapped or tied up by string and tobacco ties; singing and drumming are played in order to call in spirits to ask questions about the future or to cure sick people (Dunlop, 1986). All ceremonial acts are spiritually significant and have an unknown magic about them. The word magic is not something to be joked about or taken out of context, as the word magic is somewhat of an improper word to use in relation to ceremony; however, within the context of the English language, it will have to do as a suitable adjective. I imagine as a non-fluent speaker of Ininimowin that there is probably a more appropriate word in the language or that of Anishinaabemowin, Lakota and/or Dakota, or another Indigenous language to describe the spirituality and unexplainable answers that may be revealed to the Elders or Medicine Men that conduct the ceremony. Attending ceremony in order to receive answers to questions or to find healing is not uncommon and is something that is practiced throughout my understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing and throughout my attendance at ceremony. However, as suggested by Daniel and through a teaching that was gifted to me during ceremony, sometimes there are things that cannot be answered.

Daniel continued to explain to me how Tracy's family had been on her disappearance right away in February of that year, trying to find out where she was. Daniel recollected,

They were on it right away looking. I believe they were on the police right away and the RCMP follow their protocol. Certain amount of time has to pass before they make it official, but I believe they had the whole shebang going. Dogs and search and all that stuff, I believe, but Tracy came from a family of hunters. So her, uhh, her family are well-versed in that whole area and are good at tracking and uhh, hunting. I figured, if anyone could find her, they would. And I actually never went out to go join the search. Uhhh, I didn't want to bring (our son) into that, because he was five and I didn't know how to explain the situation to him and I didn't want to instill some kind of, I don't know how that would have affected his brain as a little boy. We're here because your mom is missing and all these people are looking. I think it would have caused panic and fear. I felt my job was the more important job for me was... to be here and love him up. And just keep going with how we are. So that's what we did. And yeah, they just never found her. They, the family suspects foul play, just cuz some of the characters in her life we're not good.

Daniel had previously mentioned that Tracy had been struggling with addictions leading into her disappearance and confirmed that he had been relayed this information by Tracy's sister.

"Alcohol, weed, pills, and then eventually meth towards the end, and I, I think she was hanging

out with a dealer, uhhh, in the last few months.” At this moment, I asked Daniel if the people whom Tracy had been last seen with had been questioned by the police. “I don’t know for sure, but they would have been. I believe the family went and asked too.” Daniel continued to tell me that he felt the family had taken the lead on the search, and he did not know how to feel about the police action.

They [police] called me. Uhh, around the time they made it official, the missing, uhh, the missing report.... March maybe, February or March, I got a call from an officer, and he just asked me the standard questions. When was the last time you heard from her, uhhh, seen her, and do you have any ideas of where she might be, and so they already had information? A lot of the information I was going to offer from her family, and I gave them thoughts on a couple more, and that was it.

It was revealed that after that point that he did not have any more contact or communication with the police; however, information was relayed to him by her family, specifically her sister. “Well, her sister was quite mad. She was mainly the only person I talked to, so whatever she had to say about the police, she was not happy about.” He relayed to me that Tracy’s sister voiced to him, “They’re not taking this seriously. They’re not believing me, they waited too long, they should have done more.” He did admitted that his friendship with Tracy’s sister, his sister-in-law, had been strained at the time too: “She was angry at me for the separation. It’s not like we had, uhhh, a loving relationship to go off of. To talk about things.” Daniel trailed off and stopped talking, looking out towards the trees. He did not speak, and I ventured to ask him what they did after they had attended ceremony to get answers, as at this point Tracy had been missing for months:

Yeah ... Yeah, nothing happened really. We just carried on, uhhh, and at the time, I didn’t have a lot of tools with which to sort out my thoughts and feelings and I wasn’t really sure on how to communicate with my boy. So, we kind of didn’t talk about it.

Daniel began to talk about his journey after Tracy was missing for a significant amount of time. There was no word, police had no leads, and her family had taken the lead on the investigation: “I was here working, just menial jobs. Cutting grass and sucking sewer out of basements on the rez, with a vacuum.” Daniel laughed at this memory and continued, “Anything really. I even bartended at South Beach, which was, which was just a stupid idea because I didn’t have enough drinking experience.” We both looked at each other and shared a laugh at this statement, as we are both non-drinkers. Daniel continued, “You should know how to drink, if you’re going to bartend. You should know your booze.” He continued to chuckle as he carried on:

But I just kind of like I'll throw myself into anything. Uhh, but I was pushing a broom one day, at a construction site. You know they made an add-on to the Pine Falls hospital, a traditional thing I was working on that with the carpenters as a labourer, pushing a broom. This was 2016 spring. And uhh, at that point in time, I was, I had been sliding slowly into a depression. And now, I was just in it and I wasn't expecting much out of life anymore. I'll, I'll go just live with Mom and Dad. Piss it and I'll be my sister-in-law's second husband. I set up a cot in the garage, none of the Romantic stuff, but I fixed the sink and I'll do the housework and I wasn't expecting much anymore. But at the same time, I wanted lots for my son, you know. I want him to have a good life. I want him to be happy and then, I guess, listening to music pushing that broom, I was like, you want these things for your son but you're not doing anything to show him how to do it. You're right, you're showing him how to be a bum right now, is what you're doing.

Daniel explained that at the time, he felt he had been living life with "no zest." He began to invoke "the secret." The secret, which I have been familiar with for many years, can be described as manifestation. Manifestation has been described as creating something by focusing thoughts and actions to manifest its creation. Daniel explained that he watched the movie with his Mom, which he found "kind of corny," but he continued to listen, thinking:

I can't discount what these people are saying. Maybe one day. So that's what I was doing, I was pushing the broom. I'm just pushing a broom, I can do this secret thing while I'm pushing a broom and so I was just like, one, I want to get better and I want to feel good again. I want a good job that means something. I want my son and I to have our own place again. Just start, I don't know how I'm going to do it but just, I'm mentally projecting where I want to go and then, uhhh, it just, it just did start to work. I got a job at Urban Circle Training Center, life skills coach, for the grade 12 program. And then, it was there, I, uhhh, part of the job was uhhh, also slash counsellor. So, the students were just flooding my office, crying, talking about their trauma and I didn't know how to handle it. I've never been in that position before so I was kind of burning out really quick and uhhh, not handling the vicarious trauma very well.

Daniel continued talking and explained how one day he ended up picking up a book that he felt his parents had strategically left lying around for him to find. He stated that his parents were adamant that they had not left it there for him to find; he truly did not understand where the book had come from, but it was the grief recovery handbook. Daniel revealed:

The introduction, caught me. It was written by this guy John James, who wasn't a doctor, or a therapist, or a counsellor. He was just, just a dude, who was from the states, who went to the Vietnam War. I think he was working as a contractor for housing,... but him and his wife, they lost their baby son, and it was devastating. So, he went around trying to get help, therapy, self-help books. But this was back in the seventies or eighties or something. Nothing was working, so he just made his own method to help to grieve.

Eventually, he revealed that this individual created “The Grief Recovery Institute out of Seattle Oregon.” This book was the catalyst for his exploration into grief, healing, and what would eventually become his career. Daniel explained to me that he had ended up going to training coincidentally back in Edmonton, to learn more on the topic of grief and loss. He stated, “It was the hardest thing I’ve ever done. Spent over four days, went through a method that helped me complete my relationship with [Tracy].” He described how the training not only gave him more good information on how to process grief but supplied him with tools he did not have to help his son. He also felt fortunate to also be trained in “how to deliver the method to people, the public, whoever wanted.”

Daniel continued with his story:

So that year, before around the time, I got the training. Just after, I ended up hooking up with (A local community helper), who I’d seen here and there, ceremony and also at Urban Circle. And I just asked him if I could join him. Be one of his people, his action therapists and he said, “Yeah, love to have you.” So I threw myself into that. Haphazardly, not really planning it out, I did that for two years, just over two and a half years and then I got picked up for this job. I got asked to apply to be a trauma worker for the WRHA, the homeless population. Last year, I started my own business too. I just, I’m more just, like, wanted to create a business and register a name and get one cheque. Just to say that I did it. I wasn’t really like being super responsible or strategic, but I called my business, *Noohtay Grief Recovery Services*. “*Noohtay*” translates to heart so.

I reflected on his admission that he had found healing through a path that is now his profession, in a multitude of ways. This was not surprising, as Daniels’s story was the last to be collected that summer. The other two women I had met with had also shared with me in detail that their work was a form of healing, and they had found not only a sense of community and support through their work but also a sense of purpose that connected their lived experience of loss to the people that they helped to deal with their grief and loss:

So, I made that business. I was doing it for a while, running grief recovery groups and one-on-ones and it’s really good work. I actually am fully... it’s a passion. It’s a real thing to be passionate about, passionate about is the pain of, uhh, people. But there’s, uhh, something very beautiful in, in how exquisite that pain is and it’s directly related to how much we love. And I, it’s pretty powerful sharing these moments with people. Cuz we’re not really uhh, society hasn’t set us up for success, when it comes to broken hearts. You know that’s what they should be teaching in schools for the kids really.

I really resonated with this admission as a teacher. I have very strong opinions, and just looking holistically, when you look at mainstream, traditional Western Society, they value the

mental and the physical, and they are completely leaving out the emotional and spiritual, and those parts are absolutely necessary. Chantelle Richmond (2015) looked to knowledge from an Anishinaabe Elder; when looking at trauma and healing, kids need to be learning emotional health in schools, and they aren't. Health was described by an Anishinaabe Elder to be bound in a significant way to not only the physical body, but also extends to intimate, spiritual relationships with one's self, the land, their families, and the wider community. Daniel further explained,

Being in love with a partner romantically or with your child or with your family is a profoundly special and like most important thing will ever have in this life. We are guaranteed, that we'll have our heartbroken and to go through pain, how come we're not having this discussion about how we process loss and emotions and how we express and how we share the good and the bad. We're guaranteed everyone's going to be hurt really bad, but right now we're all trained to just be silent about it and be tough be professional. Keep going, don't let anything get you down. There needs to be a flip, a shift to have these conversations because (my son), with the loss of his mother, like, where would they be, if I just started drinking and doing drugs,... and telling him to shut up and don't talk about it.

I am reminded of the multi-generational and intergenerational trauma that continues to impact Indigenous Peoples. It is clear from current conditions, such as MMIWG2S trauma, further perpetuate abuse and negatively impact future generations. The ongoing and harmful effects of inter-generational trauma are insidious; however, Daniels's story is a good example of how these patterns and intergenerational curses are being broken within Indigenous families through the process of emotional, spiritual, and physical healing:

So, it was the secret, that I was evoking. I was inspired by my son. So that's where all this came from really and now life's really good. Like Gabe is doing remarkably well. He's really emotionally present, and solid. And solid, meaning we still have our good cries. You know. But the cries aren't something bad, that we have to stop or attend to or cope with. It's just, let's just be embracing the misery of the moment and then through that, you end up finding your way back to gratitude, for what you've had. And then, just thinking about life and relative terms and time passing. Cuz I'm 40 and it seems to have gone by pretty quick. If I make another 40, then I've outlived all of my grandparents, by twenty years and if that goes by in a blink, I could be gone dead and before you know it, I'll see Tracey again and we'll probably pick up right where we left off. Her giving me s*** and me giving her a piece of my mind. There's such a...

Daniel trailed off and looked at me. He apologized, "Sorry, I'm all over the place." I could completely understand him and where he was coming from. From what he had told me, this was one of the first times he's had the opportunity and the right space in which to share his

story, encompassing not only Tracy's disappearance but also his thoughts, feelings, and emotions; his story. He continued with his thoughts: "There's such a, an illusion of control, that everyone has.... I have a plan, and this is how my life is going to be." I was immediately struck with the memories of my own life, which passed before my eyes. "Creator has other plans for everyone," I respond. Daniel continued, "Yeah, all we have control over is the here and now." I looked at him and said, "And our choices and our decision making. That's the greatest gift. For sure is." As I trailed off on this very profound conversation in which we were exploring the complexities of life, as if he knew that moment would be perfect to interject, the dog began to howl with sirens that seemed to be getting closer to us quickly. Daniel tried to continue, "Like I can control what I'm saying right now.... Neo shut up!" Daniel abruptly cut himself off, seemingly controlled by the howling of his pet dog, Neo. We looked at each other and shared a heartfelt laugh together. Looking out beyond the yard, over the house on to the road, where we still did not see what type of vehicle is creating the sirens, the dog, Neo, continued to howl. Daniel shouted at the dog, "Neo!!" Looking back at me, he said in a lower voice, "It's odd to hear sirens ... here." As the word here left his lips, he looked back out at the road, as if he may see what is creating the siren. He looked confused, shook his head, and turned back towards me, as if to signal for us to continue.

I inquire about the conversation he has had with his and Tracy's child. Considering his son was only five years old when his mother disappeared and Daniel has worked diligently since 2017, at what I wanted to call "his healing journey," I thought it may be important to explore this. Daniel nodded, as the sirens wailed closer. "What in the hell?" The sirens seem to be coming down the dirt road and pass right by us. I look out at the road and beyond, "There's a fire?" Daniel seemed confused, "I don't think I've ever seen a fire truck on that road, and I've been here 30 years. Maybe it's a [inaudible]? No, it's been raining. Oh whatever?" He thinks to himself and then looked back over to me as if to shrug off the interruption by the fire truck. "Fall of 2017 is when I took that training, that's when I felt better. Better at starting to have the conversations with [my son], at least knowing how to approach him." He looked over at me as if he was going to unveil some new idea to me and began:

And uhhh, it's, it's basically how I do my work now with people. I kind of.... The journey through the grief and the pain, it's like, it's like a dark forest. I like metaphors.... A dark forest that you haven't been through before, you just know, you can get lost in it and stay there and suffer, or you can keep pushing try and find your way through it. So

now, we having gone through it doing the work with my son and then with other people was like going back.

In this moment, I was profoundly moved, as I too enjoy metaphors, figurative language, and analogies. My father, whom I've spoken about throughout this work, taught me about life in this way. I know exactly where Daniel is going with his metaphor. I said, "To help other people?" Daniel looked up and smiled at me. He nodded and says, "Flashlight, map, some snacks." I nod and reply, "Knowing the way, knowing the route?" Daniel exclaimed,

Yeah! And then it's kind of like, leading the way. So, now with my boy. If I'm feeling things, I don't hide it from him. I will cry openly, or I'll express whatever I happen to be feeling. Then he gets to see me just go through it and come out of it. and then I talked to him about it so for him it's been pretty intense so we've done a lot a lot of different things screaming, crying and the fires in the bush and ceremonies offerings food and prayers and stuff everything and everything we can to get these things out and that's what I kind of do with people as well and what helps is being able to start so I share so there's more fear about sharing regarding how I'm feeling or whatever and I think when you're able to do that embolded courage you create space for other people to also, be like, I feel like sharing. Cus mostly everybody shies away from talking about hard stuff. Especially guys. So, we're always locked up no one gets to see because the world is taught me that it's too dangerous to do so it's not helpful.... For everyone to ridicule you or make you feel bad or tell you to get over it.

I reflect on this idea, as many times over, I have heard people describe residential schools or the negative impacts as things that Indigenous People need to "get over," but what many people fail to recognize is that Indigenous People are still dealing with damaging colonial structures that have not changed. Indigenous People continue to experience the impacts and traumas. That is why devastating problems such as MMIWG2S continue to happen. I relayed to Daniel how I have been told in the past to just to get over my mother's death. I will never find the answers, I will never get justice, and her murderer will never be found and put in jail. I have been told that investigating on my own, applying for police records through FIPPA, finding medical records, and even writing this thesis is "like picking at a scab." Daniel responded to my reflection:

It is picking at a scab, and that's exactly what you have to do. Another metaphor is uhh... first, the body, humans, all have like an inherent natural it would be the ability to heal so if we get a cut if we create the right circumstance, we clean it and tend to it it'll want to mend itself... And our hearts and our hearts breaking are like the same thing, except, we don't most of us most people I've talked to haven't had that in life with their parents or anybody hasn't really, given them tools to help with it.... So, you'll hear things like get

over it that doesn't help there's so much power in language and word usage that can be, can be so relieving or so devastating.

This idea resonated with me, as I have been uncovering my wounds and actively working at my own healing throughout the almost 20 years since my mother's death. This thesis work was inspired by my own healing, in order to try and help others like myself who have been impacted by this terrible crisis. It is interesting to think deeper on this analogy, as we do, innately, want to heal ourselves, just like the process that our bodies take in order to heal cuts automatically. No one wants to continue to experience hurt or pain or to relive their traumas over and over; however, some people are more equipped to tend to their wounds than others. This points to a solution: to help others find healing by giving them the tools to not only "pick at their scabs" but to also "dress their wounds," which is what Daniel has been doing with his practice and work with others through their grief and loss.

Daniel switched gears to begin to describe some of the methodologies he discovered as he trained in grief counselling and healing. He began to describe details of the training he took:

My trainer was a psychologist for this grief method she worked out of, or she still does work in Edmonton.... She threw a fancy word at us, which was neurolinguistics. Something about the brain and language ... being able to say things when it's true. It has like a healing capability.

Daniel quickly asked me if I was familiar with a well-known Elder from northern Manitoba. He mentioned that a couple years later, in reflecting on this idea of neurolinguistics, he was sitting with this Elder, who creates the connection to Indigenous languages. Neurolinguistics studies the relation of language and communication to different aspects of brain function. In other words, it tries to explore how the brain understands and produces language and communication (Ahlsén, 2006).

In the mention of this Elder, I am fondly reminded of him. I had just met him the previous winter because he had helped me with my Auntie's sacred fire at her funeral wake in Norway House. I reveal to him how significant it was for me to meet this particular Elder:

There's three churches in Norway House, and we were the first family to ever have a fire at that church. So apparently (from what I was told), I think we were only the third or fourth family in the whole Community to ever request to have a fire for anybody. Umm, so like, there was one there at the Catholic Church. Umm, one family decided not to have their family at any of the churches, so they had it at the multiplex and they had a fire outside, umm, for their family member. Umm, were the first family to have it at the, I guess, Anglican Church.

Daniel was surprised and replied, “Oh yah?” listening intently until I am finished. I described to him in detail how there had never been a fire at that church before and how much of the community came to wish me luck and thank me for having a fire. I felt very supported throughout the process, especially from the Elder who had provided me with the wood to keep my fire going. One of the community members had even come by to show me the spot in which they plan to put a fire pit for the next family who would like to honour their loved one in this way. I fondly remember how I had also attended ceremony led by the Elder while I was home.

Daniel described him as what he feels in his mind would be:

like my romantic view of what, if I could just imagine, a majestic Northern native man is.... Powerful, speaks the language, has a gentle, calming presence. I mean, I don't know him super well. We've spent a little bit of time talking he goes to the [well known] Sundance where...

Coincidentally I had just been to a sweat lodge ceremony that past week with that Elder and mentioned it to Daniel. He quickly mentioned how he had been introduced to this particular medicine man:

We got hooked up with [the medicine man], my dad had cancer when I was 23, so they did, so we've been involved with that family since then or he's the one who kind of, not kind of empowered me to start running my own sweats. So that's that, it's back there in a building I'll go show you it after.

Daniel continued:

But yeah so in the world of ceremony and we were at a sweat. (the Elder) was running it, it was before the Sundance was starting, and I was sitting beside him, and he's giving a pre-sweat pep talk before the rocks are coming in when we when we do these things when we're in ceremony, and we're praying, and we're talking, and all of this stuff when we use our words in a good way, it's good medicine. In the language, you can say “*Mi tay na nee Mi tan*” and he's like, and I'm like, “What's that mean?” He answers, “*My tongue dances what my heart feels.*”

Daniel exclaimed that this is a perfect example of neurolinguistics. I relayed to him how I had learned a few words from this Elder and that: “The connection to language is very significant.... The more you understand the language, it becomes clearer that you can understand yourself, who you are, your identity.” I revealed to Daniel, “I didn't grow up that way, like, I was very disconnected from ... who I am (as an Ininiw Iskwew). Until I just did work to, to know myself and the culture. Indigenous people.” Daniel agreed and continued:

So (the Elder) says this to me, "*Mitay Nani Mitan*," and then it was, it was half a year or a year later, I had been doing talks, presentations to different places on grief on all of this. It hit me one day that, holy shit, what [the Elder] was talking about is neurolinguistics. That's the Cree perspective of neurolinguistics. So the use of our language, and we start seeing these things.... I miss my mom to my son; you both lost your mom. Sorry, I just having some problems here.

Daniel looked away and took a short pause. I could tell that he is somewhat struggling with sharing because he is overcome with emotions. Daniel said,

Or even the simplest of things. I feel terrible, or I'm angry at her for leaving, or whatever to have the freedom to say whatever it is that you want to uhhh ... is how, is the way in which we can start to heal, and uhhh, get happy again and I think, I, I kind of always thought about that.

As I continue to listen intently to what he was sharing with me, Daniel began to uncover the reasoning behind why he chose not to participate within the national inquiry into MMIWG2S:

That's why I never took part in, like, in the inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls and uhhh, I never got mad at the police because I just felt like, no matter which way, no matter which way I slice this up, she still gone and everything's going to lead right back to my own heart and the work I have to do. So getting mad or taking action is just, is something to do in the meantime but really what I really need to do is find love and forgiveness and peace and happiness and that's what, that's what Tracy would have wanted. Having a body would be just a thing. Some people would say that, that it's especially hard for you and (my son) because you don't have a body to bury so you'll never have closure and I resented that before I even had processed it. That's b*****! That's like condemning us to a life of pain... And uhhh, not being resolved. So I don't really believe in that, closure in that sense, when it comes to Tracy. Ummm, missing and not found is the same as dying and buried that physical presence, isn't there anymore and that's that was the most important part was being able to touch somebody and uhhh, hear their voice... Smell them... So that's what's missing is that touch you know.

Daniel looked off far in the distance; there has been so much emotion in his words, and the look on his face was forlorn. He did not move his head, he continued to look out into the distance, as if searching his thoughts. I can only begin to imagine what he must have been thinking about as he played over the loss in his mind; missing the mother of his child. The loss of my mother still lingers in my mind on a daily basis, and his admission about wanting to hear their voices, smell them, hit home with me. There is absolutely nothing that can replace those longings for your loved one. Nothing can replicate them, no amount of justice and no amount of

acknowledgement. Our loved ones are gone, always remembered, but they are not with us in the physical form.

After a moment of reflecting on this, I am brought back to thoughts of the National Inquiry, and I asked Daniel if he could further explain to me why he chose not to participate. He turned back towards me and simply stated,

Well it's not going to bring her back, the Inquiry. Whatever they have to say won't put her before me and that's what me and (my son) would have liked and yeah society isn't set up very well there's lots of systemic racism. There's ... it's all been pretty unfair and unjust for a very long time.... Colonization and residential schools and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. But aside from all of the social barriers and all these things it all ends up being work that we all have to do.

I looked at him and asked, "Individually?" Daniel replied, "Individually and as families." He continued:

Like, Tracy was uhhh, sexually abused by her father. She told me a month before we broke up. Before she filed for divorce. I had never known that. I was kind of blown away, "What!?" Sexually abused by her sister, her half-sister, the older one sexually abused by a guy in the community (a relative who is now the chief)... I don't know if it was actual rape, but it was fondling and grabbing when she was a child, offering her money for sex, from her dad, and uhhh, she went through a lot and it was all ... and as far as I know, it was all swept under the rug, and everyone knows it, and no one talks about it, and that to me, is the biggest issue right there. An inquiry is not going to fix that it; it shines a light on it and that's important, so I'm not discounting it.

There are many critics who have spoken about the National Inquiry and its colonial model, and many have criticized how the process took place. There have been many fair considerations taken into account of the National Inquiry and its process; however, it is fair to acknowledge that there is no government document that states, reports, and analyzes what we as Indigenous People have known or what we have lived or what we have experienced as Indigenous People for centuries. There is a documented report that states there may no longer be discredit to what Indigenous women, girls, or Two-Spirit people have been saying, because this documents states the truth (The National Inquiry, 2019).

In the moment, I am brought back to our conversation about how the family had led the search for Tracy, and I asked Daniel if her family is still looking for her. He responded, "No, they had, they started having Memorial round dances every year, and they just had the fourth one last December." Daniel went on to describe to me how, due to the admission made by Tracy about sexual abuse, Daniel and his son:

Went to the first one, but we didn't want to go back because I knew her dad would be there. I just, I ended up telling him he would have to wait until (his grandson) is an old man and he dies to have a relationship with him because he wasn't going to know his grandson in this lifetime, if I have a choice. [My son] will be 18, and he can do whatever he wants. I just, I didn't want to go back to have to feel ... out of sorts and but in a few months ago, two months ago, between two and three. Tracy's sister and I were not really strained anymore, but we're better, we're saying I love you and planning trips and trying to get together, but she had her own ceremony, they had a, like, funeral for her, so they made a box, made a box like a casket almost and they went out to the bush where Tracy like to be, where she did her research and they put in letters or pictures and things like that and they had a thing.

Daniel continued to describe to me how he feels that Tracy's sister was the "most determined one, had the most fire when it came to looking for her, advocating for her." He felt that it had to do with her healing, as well, to grieve the loss of her sister. At this point, we shifted to discussing if there is currently still an open police file for Tracy. Daniel revealed that he does not know and suggested I look for clues online, expressing how he wished "there was more responsible reporting." He described how he has fears about what his son will see on the internet in regard to his mother's disappearance.

[He] has access to the internet, and now he has, he asked me one time 'Was my mom a bad person?' Cuz she was doing drugs, and I was just like where the hell did you get that, and he's like, the news. I'm like f*****, and so I'd show him the news reports walk him through that.

This is a perfect example that shows how media representation of Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people is detrimental to not only representation for others, but the harmful impacts on loved ones, family members, and children can be devastating. Imagine losing a mother and having the police reports victim blame her for her disappearance or death? Sadly, these are common occurrences for the loved ones and family members of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people. As mentioned throughout this research, having loved ones be empowered to express their stories and re-write the history and truths of their loved one's deaths and disappearances is of utmost importance.

Daniel picked up his phone and began typing and scrolling through it. He found what he was looking for, leaned over, and handed me his phone to show me a Google search of Tracy. Immediately, I recognized the information he was showing me. It is a collective newspaper story that a journalist has researched and collected on unsolved cases across Canada. I immediately stated, "I have some of this data in my report. Umm, in my report, it talks a lot about cases that

haven't been solved cases that haven't been moved forward by police." I looked up from the phone and asked Daniel, "I don't know how much I talked about my mom's story. I don't know if I did ... if when we talked over the phone." I trail off, thinking deeply about the information he has presented to me about his ex-wife and the countless others within that research. I think about how my mother's name is missing in that news story and how if only her story was heard, maybe someone knows something. My thoughts were racing, Daniel answered, "Just a little bit." With my thought racing to the many victims, including Tracy, within the news story, I felt inclined to share pieces of my mother's story with Daniel. I began:

There was never any investigation into my Mother's death.... She was found in her apartment. When we went in there, her ... there were no keys. Her doors had been locked.... Umm, I've gone through paper, I have police reports; there's nothing in there; they did nothing. I have the medical examiner's report as well. It says inconclusive, and there's also a note at the bottom that says due to previous mental health conditions as well as previous, umm, alcohol and drug use, it is assumed that that's what killed her.... There was no alcohol, there was no drugs there, there was no evidence to support [those claims], ... and we have people that we have, our own suspects.

I was filled with emotion and pain as I revealed other details to him about how and why I have chosen to do this work and create this thesis and work with others like myself who are impacted by this problem:

Acknowledgement is all I want. I will never get Justice. No one will ever get Justice... You know, there's so many of us, just people don't know until they're in it, until they're directly (impacted by) it.... I think we can all do better.

Daniel looked closely at me and said, "It's good work that you're doing." He looked away and shook his head. Looking down and then back up at me, "That's uhh ...a shit story." Daniel doesn't say anything for a minute, as if still trying to digest what I have just revealed to him, and he continued:

Yeah, so slightly different. That sounds like b***** what you're saying. How the police handled your mother. That's horrible, and I can understand how. I guess, I can appreciate or imagine what it must feel like to have them. My energy was more like, I was more angry at her family. It didn't have to be like that, you know, like, I... when we separated, custody, missing, I was lucky. I'm lucky because Mom and Dad are good people, and you know they Blue Collar nurse and a welder. They, they chipped away at life, and they've always been there in my corner when I was going through all of this. Dad came and lived with me. They had a house to sell. They've been in our corner, and Tracy, when a parent sexually abused as a child, it's, it's the betrayal. You're supposed to love me and protect me so I can only imagine what has been in Tracy's heart all of those years. Man-sized beatings she said she had back problems because her dad broke a

hockey stick over her back when she was [son's] age or whatever, so I don't know I can say with some confidence none of that was reconciled properly so when we fell apart I had a circle that was loving and supportive not a lot of trauma and her Circle was filled with all of this s*** that has been there forever and not prepared and their ceremonial family her dad is a Sundance leader a sexually abusive Sundance leader red flag would be nice to know that it didn't have to be like this she could have still been here working on her Ph.D. we could have gotten through this and been I healed separated couple but the family structure wasn't in place and I know, like, people who abused children, it comes from somewhere, learned behaviour or it happened to them. Who knows what the case may be?

In hearing this revelation, I feel a strong sense of empathy, and I can only help to make my own connections, as these issues are often found within many stories of MMIWG2S and other problems that are negatively impacting Indigenous Peoples. I softly asked, "Was her family in residential schools or was there a family breakdown?" I think of the negative impacts of residential school, the sixties scoop that my family was a part of, and the continuing problem of over representation of Indigenous youth in care. Daniel looked forlorn and continued softly, "There was residential school involvement, so as much as I had anger towards her father, I know he probably has his own." He cut himself off and looked away from me towards the house and then continued, "Yeah, he does have his own story, but I don't know what it is. But there a lot of work has to be done at home, in your own heart and it all begins with being able to speak up and then have it received." He seemed to have remembered something, so he switched gears and began,

See, couple years ago, I was, for some odd reason, I was going through my emails, of a million emails and I end up finding this one that I sent to myself and it was a letter that Tracy had wrote and I was like how did this get here and it hadn't been opened yet. How did I not see this? She must have gotten onto my email and sent it to myself like a little Easter egg I read it and it was like it was to (our son) and we were still together and he was one and a half and, uhh, she starts off the letter by saying you're only one and I'm already screwing up and she goes on talking about it's not a long letter but she said I had a hard life a lot of hurt and it's I'm wrecking this I'm ruining things and your dad should leave me but he's stubborn and he won't and uhhh it says I want you to go to Manitoba to be around your family over there where you'll be safe and you'll be loved. So, and I could keep going on with that so it's a little different. From your experience, from your loss of your mom, to this one I was going to say something else and I forgot.

Daniel seemed to be conflicted in sharing the information about the email. It seemed that he almost immediately changed the subject, interjecting,

I know the news tried to reach out before. Oh, actually, the cops might have called one more time. I think it was a few months down the road like a 90-day follow-up or I don't know what it was but they just asked have you heard any new word. I was like 'no' it was just a brief call.

I reiterated and asked Daniel if it was only the two times that he had communication with the police. Daniel answered me, "I think it was twice." Previous to the both of us meeting in person, Daniel and I had spoken briefly over the phone and had discussed that his dealings with the police had been momentary. He felt that if any police involvement had happened, it was with her immediate family. I asked him if their family had been contacted recently within the past five years of her being missing, Daniel looked out over the land and then down: "Yeah, five and half. Yeah, I don't know? I could ask Tracy's sister. Find out." Daniel inhaled and let out a long sigh, as if he was trying to clear the weight from his thoughts. My heart ached, as I too understood the longevity of hurt that still impacts me and my family, almost 20 years later. Without the contact or communication with police, the unanswered questions make that time seem so much longer. The hurt stings just that much more without justice, a resolution, or acknowledgement of the case of a missing or murdered loved one. Daniel lifted his head and said,

"The news reached out before, and I didn't want to talk to them... Yeah, I felt like I was too angry to. I was angry at her family for a while cuz they were all like the police aren't doing anything and the inquiry is b*****! They're lashing out at the world and internally, I'm like, "You f***** people."

In this moment, Daniel admitted that Tracy's family had been a part of the National Inquiry. Through the exploration of his story, you can see how he may have been left out of this process. Being an ex-partner and father to their child, he could have very well been a part of the process with Tracy's family; however, the family breakdown and the reasonings why their relationship was strained kept them distanced. Daniel continued, "I was like you guys started this with all of your toxicity. I was directing my anger towards their family which was not good, but that's how I felt at the time."

As I reflected on his words, I looked at him closely and shared with him how I often talk about the anger, as this is a common emotion felt by many of us who have been impacted by the problem of MMIWG2S. I revealed how "I used to be angry." I explained to him something that was shared with me by a fellow educator through the experience of participating in a professional development exercise, a well-known workshop that explores the impacts of

colonization on the Indigenous Peoples of Canada. I explained how I have talked about the idea of anger at lengths in a lot of different situations because I feel that a lot of people do not understand that anger is a secondary emotion to hurt. In order for healing to take place, I feel that individuals need to really start to recognize: “Well I’m not angry; I’m hurt.” I explained how it is really the beginning of the end because that is the realization that you need to start unraveling the hurt, rather than the anger. The root cause of anger is hurt, and if more people were aware of this, the focus would be on a solution, what should be worked on, rather than hyper-focusing on the problem.

In exploring if he had anything else he wanted to share, he answered back:

No, only that I’m happy you contacted me and I reached out. I’m grateful to do this... I always thought you know you hear about Tina Fontaine and all of the other... Well known things in Winnipeg and I always thought it odd that no one brought up Tracy’s name cuz she was an alumni of (a Winnipeg university) and an accomplished University student, who her community, the chief previously, people, would go to her for advice to talk to oil and gas companies. So, she was a significant person to Academia but no one mentioned (her).

So I think it’s nice to do this, I think, share a bit of her story, (in) this research... I didn’t want to share anything with anyone else, like, in terms of media or the Inquiry or whatever. So, it’s just a good thing. I admire you for doing it.

I thanked him for the wishes and revealed to him how much of this project is a huge part of my own healing journey, making peace with the circumstances surrounding my mother’s death, which has had a lot to do with the lack of acknowledgement: “There’s so many people and, and this project is for my mom and for all of the other people who have been impacted and for the people they’ve lost.” Daniel looked closely at me and asked me what my mom’s name was. “Her name is Holly ... Holly (Sinclair) Wolfe.”

In revealing to me his final thoughts, he explained how he has tried to begin dating again. I can only imagine this would be the final piece of healing in losing his ex-wife. Daniel explained,

I tried, I got backed into it dating. It’s fun, it’s, it’s a good time. It feels good to be work through the, the trauma of it all and the grief and to be more grounded emotionally. So, there’s no rush in that area. I find there’s like a positive pressure, possibly, active pressure from my parents and uhh... Brother and wife are worried that I’ll be alone forever, but then, now it gives you time. When you work through this stuff, that’s I guess, that’s the gift of it all (grief and loss). You know? It really forces a person to look at how you’ve been operating. His words resonate with me and I respond to him that it gives people the ability to re-evaluate and “work on themselves, grief is the greatest teacher. I

honestly, truly do believe that because it's like the finality... you can't change it, it's final ...it's the grief that comes after. You just have to keep... keep pushing.

Daniel told me that he has shared everything that he would like to, and we end the recording. At this point, we decided to go for a walk around the property. The sun was still shining, and it was a considerably beautiful day. I collected my belongings, and we discussed how he would show me the sweat lodge that was built on the property. Daniel explained that he is trained in holding lodges, and this is where he had previously performed the ceremony. I observed, just off to the side of the large rock in which the gazebo was sitting, an octagon shaped building with a sky light in the roof. Inside the building was a sweat lodge. He mentioned that he and his father had built it together and that he has conducted sweat lodges there on different occasions. At this time, he offered the use of the lodge to me and the other participants in order to come together to have a sweat lodge ceremony, which he was very open to conducting for us all. It is important to note that during this time, there were set gathering restrictions due to the Covid 19 pandemic, and the gathering of large groups was prohibited.

We left the building and went for a walk on the grounds into the bush, and I noted that it was a very warm sunny day. The sun was shining through the trees, and I could see particles dancing in the air; it looked like a happy place. This specific location is quite close to a place in which I grew up, Victoria Beach, Manitoba. In that moment, I felt the memories of my youth being played back to me, as I had spent much of my time on the land near there, which resembled their property. I felt like Daniel's home would be the perfect setting for land-based healing; a perfect place to be able to go and spend time on the land, spend time with Mother Earth, as there were so many trees, berries, plants, and some medicine. It felt very peaceful.

Daniel walked over to one of the trees, and he explained that it was a Balsam, and he picked up a stick and talked about the medicine inside the tree. He used the stick to puncture the tree, and sap began to come out of where he punctured the tree. Daniel described how the sap was a natural salve, which could be put on burns, cuts, or scrapes, and he described that it was a good medicine to use for these ailments. We continued to walk, and as we walked, I noticed that they had quite a few different berry bushes. We talked a little bit about the saskatoons and how I had picked them with one of the other participants at my special place: Little Mountain Park. We also spoke about the raspberry bushes and chokecherry trees that were located on the property and the healing aspects of those fruits. We finally stopped at some tiger lily flowers and chatted

until we felt it was a good time to have lunch and went back inside to sit with his parents until we said our goodbyes. We talked a little bit about the upcoming Sharing Circle, and as I was preparing to leave, one of the things that struck me was that Daniel mentioned, “I feel like I was supposed to meet you.” This resonated with me, as this was something that had been mentioned within Angel’s story. These same words had been used by her to describe our chance meeting. I reflected on this after Daniel and I hugged, and I left to travel back to Winnipeg.

During my drive back to Winnipeg, I thought about the people I had met in order to complete this work, to collect these stories, and to share their grief, their pain, and their love with others in order to better understand the experience of living through the disappearance and/or murder of a loved one and to hopefully help to find a solutions to the continuing problem of MMIWG2S. I hope that this work finds you, that you know it is for a reason, a purpose, and that there is a deeper meaning for you to find this work and read it through in its full extent. It was meant to find you. Ekosi.

Chapter Six: Recommendations

August 7, 2020, we met at Ndinewe on Burrows Avenue in Winnipeg. Lorraine and Daniel were in attendance, the Elder I had invited to join was not feeling well that day and was unable to attend. Since the Elder was unable to attend, I passed tobacco to Lorraine in order for her to begin the Sharing Circle with a prayer. We were provided an offering of berries by Ndinawe as a feast to start our Sharing Circle in a good way. A feast plate was set aside with berries and tobacco for the loved ones whom we were honouring throughout the sharing of our recommendations. A sacred fire was held by me later that evening, where I prayed for the berries, and they were put in the fire for our loved ones as an offering to feed their spirits. I brought my bundle with me to the Sharing Circle, and I began lighting a smudge that was passed around the circle. We smudged ourselves to begin the Sharing Circle in a good way with positive energy and intentions and a good clear mind, heart, and body. We began the Sharing Circle by talking a little bit about how our prayers were connected to our hearts and for our loved ones who have been lost. We spoke of how challenging it is to work within colonial circles. One of the participants used the analogy:

It's almost as if we are circle pegs trying to be fit into square holes, in relation to colonial institutions being the square holes and Indigenous people being the circle pegs, being forced to fit into places that we don't belong.

Many challenges are faced when dealing with issues such as MMIWG2S and the colonial context in which we are living in the current society. As found within the collection of stories in this work, the connection to colonialism and the problem of MMIWG2S is overarching.

Please add a paragraph that tells us what your main subtopics are going to be. Without that list, I am only guessing at your main and subtopics for this chapter

Police Re-Development

To begin the sharing portion of the story collection, I offered my aspirations on hopefully continuing my work within my PhD to continue to help find solutions to the problem of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people. My hope is to build on what the National Inquiry (2019) into MMIWG2S has suggested through their 231 calls for justice, which would be to create reports that would help facilitate the action plans to address some of the systemic issues reported within the National Inquiry. I recalled there was a specific program implemented by the Winnipeg Police Department called *Project Devote*, which specifically

looked at Indigenous women and girls who have either been murdered or gone missing in Manitoba, which was developed to close cold case files (Bernhardt, 2020; Martens, 2020). Project “Devote was a partnership between Winnipeg police and the RCMP, focused on resolving cold cases related to exploited people, including missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. But it had little success. In nine years, just one case was closed” (Bernhardt, 2020, para. 5). This project has come under scrutiny within the past few years by MMIWG2S advocates, as there has been little movement or case closures within the past 11 years of this project being run, and there has been a large lack of success and lack of progress (Martens, 2020).

This project specifically opened up a number of cold case files and current files that helped to begin investigations again into the disappearances or murders of women or girls in order to find the murderers and close the files. I voiced that I felt that a redeveloped program such as this would be beneficial on an ongoing basis, due to the fact of newly reported instances of murders and disappearances of Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people throughout the province. There is a definite need for an ongoing program such as this that would specifically address disappearances and murders of Indigenous women and girls in Manitoba and suggested that it should be facilitated most importantly by the Indigenous community, grassroots movements, and people with lived experience and loved ones of those who have either disappeared or been murdered in collaboration with the Winnipeg Police Service. In collaboration of this effort, we discussed the need for a city or provincial action plan.

Action Plan

A recommendation discussed was the significant need for an action plan to be drawn up by policing that would specifically address issues pertaining to Indigenous women, girls, or Two-Spirit people to be created for and by the Indigenous community. As this research has shown, there has been a significant outcry that speaks about the othering of Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people who have been significantly marginalized; any direct movements taken by policing to address MMIWG2S should focus on their very specific and distinct circumstances and needs in regards to their murders or disappearances. Additionally, this research has shown how the needs of MMIWG2S differ quite significantly to those of non-Indigenous women and girls. In sharing this information, it was suggested that the data collection process by policing, which would specifically relay supports and services to addressing

Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit investigations, is somewhat to that of a Gladue report⁴. In cases where there is justice involvement, Gladue reports that are used within the justice system to look closely at a family's background, history, upbringing, current realities, or living situations that basically give a strong, detailed look at the whole life of an individual. The recommendation was that there should be certain documents created for missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people, where police would look not only at their current circumstances but also their whole life, because those issues have created their disappearances and murders. Gladue reports are extensive and take into account so much information that would be helpful for police to address the circumstances surrounding a disappearance or a murder (Pfefferle, 2006; King, 2013). When a Gladue report is taken, it is usually taken by a community organization that works within the justice system, which is usually conducted by people who care and show empathy towards the individual whose involved within the justice system. This is very different than the policing process, which has been found to lack empathy and be very disheartening and concerning for loved ones of the victims. Gladue reports give a sense of that person's voice being heard, which has been discussed by each of the participants as an essential and important aspect of trying to address the murder or disappearance of their loved one because often, families do not feel heard by police. This recommendation would address meeting the needs of family voices so they feel seen, heard, and acknowledged, as well as feeling they are being taken seriously by police during the investigation of their loved one's death or disappearance through a third party. This recommendation was strengthened by the suggestions made throughout the participants' stories, which acknowledged the need for a stronger focus on affectively working with families.

Police Training and Cultural Competency

The need for effective training in regard to understanding the history and current context of Indigenous People throughout Canada for policing is essential to effectively completing investigations into MMIWG2S, as well as potential changes to the hiring process of new police officers. The Sharing Circle discussed at length the prerequisites for being a police officer, as

⁴ The Gladue report is a presentencing or bail hearing report, which contains recommendations to the court about what an appropriate sentence might be, and include information about the Aboriginal persons' background such as: history regarding residential schools, child welfare removal, physical or sexual abuse, underlying developmental or health issues, such as FASD, anxiety, or substance use.

well as how police officers seem to lack empathy or are unsympathetic, unknowing, or have a lack of an understanding of Indigenous People and their history. Participants shared that they felt police lack the skills and ability to make connections to history; essentially, why and how things may be the way they are, when they look at the situation and/or interact with family members or other people that they are dealing with, and they do so in a very hard and unempathetic manner. It was observed that police officers' lack of empathy may stem from the lack of connection to Indigenous Peoples, conflicting world views, and no lived experience, as well as the fact that police officers who are selected to be on the police force may come from a more privileged background than that of Indigenous People. This lack of connection with Indigenous People hinders the work they are doing with them because as we can clearly see from the overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples involved in the justice system and over incarcerations, often the MMIWG2S loved ones may be involved with the justice system or they may have committed a crime. Police officers may wrongfully take this into consideration when doing background checks and feel some type of negative bias towards the people they are supposed to be working with and for in investigations of MMIWG2S.

Further to this, police officers may have been taught to have a hard demeanour or a lack of empathy in order to maintain a sense of objectivity, but when engaged in cases of MMIWG2S, this can be detrimental. Notably mentioned, it is assumed that the higher-ranking police officers who have been on the force for longer times (for example, a 60-year-old police force veteran) are the people who are training the younger officers who have just come onto the police force. It was suggested that a police officer who has been on the police force for 60 years has probably seen many changes throughout the years and may have a different worldview than that of a younger police officer. Through observation of previous conduct by policing regarding MMIWG2S and current strained relations with the Indigenous community, it was also suggest that veteran police officers may be set in their ways, and they may handle situations in a way that the current society would deem as being unacceptable behaviour.

A recommendation made was that police should be comprised of people who have a heart and have developed a sense of empathy, which was discussed as something quite challenging to address within a police force because how can you evaluate somebody's empathy or select whether somebody is more empathetic than another? However, empathy can be taught, as previously discussed with Angel when she suggested sensitivity training. We further discussed

how families are often dismissed and put off by police in a very damaging way, which can lead to further duress for families dealing with the death or disappearance of their loved ones. There is a definite need for something to be added to the hiring of police officers in regard to empathy, and it was also suggested that there may be issues with the current police testing. As specifically mentioned by Angel in her story sharing, there is a distinct need to put in place cultural and sensitivity training for police that addresses the needs of Indigenous people. This should be the number one main priority when looking at police officers who are being trained to work throughout Canada and, most importantly, in Winnipeg, Manitoba, due to the city having the highest population of Indigenous Peoples.

Hiring Indigenous police officers should also be a top priority, as having a police officer who is of the same culture that can connect with victims' loved ones can make a huge difference in whether their experience is positive or negative. Indigenous People should be a large part of this change. It was suggested that there should be a huge focus to have Indigenous People work on the police force, in multiple capacities, who have lived experience, in order to efficiently and successfully work with our most vulnerable populations of people in Manitoba. This can be a big part of changing and addressing the issue of MMIWG2S, as well as building stronger connections with the Indigenous community.

Relationship Building with Police

Further to this, families with missing loved ones need consistency from each of the individuals who are working on their loved one's case. Specific attention should be given to expanding the role of women, who are seen as the ones who should be addressing these cases. A note was made through the Sharing Circle that more women should not only be police officers but also specifically be assigned to the cases of MMIWG2S. It was expressed that many times, families are left within the shadows, kept in the dark, and they are not given updates or the information that they feel they need to provide them with a sense of comfort, or understanding, or simply even knowing what is going on with the case of their loved one. It was recommended that men, as well as women, on the police force should be taught some form of emotional intelligence within training to work on MMIWG2S cases. It was theorized that many police officers may have been raised and given values by someone who may not have the same worldviews or values of the people they are serving. Many people are not taught compassion; many people are not taught to talk about grief, and this is the reason why people often do not

know what to do. These are things that should be requirements in the selection process of police officers.

In many instances, police officers are desensitized by what they have seen, and so when loved ones of the victims are expecting an emotional response or compassion and do not receive one, it is apparent that there needs to be something that addresses this component to better support the needs of the families and loved ones. It was suggested that the police force needs to be an overall healthier system, and there needs to be extensive changes made within the overall system. There has not been a very large movement of change, and it almost seems like it has been happening at a glacial pace in regard to changes because we are still seeing the same systemic issues impacting Indigenous People all the way back to the North West Mounted Police until today. The appearance and view of police officers created within society is that they are a “hard task organization” that is very heavy handed in their delivery of service to the public and specifically the Indigenous community and inner city in Winnipeg. Citizens should be able to look up to police; however, there is significant damaging evidence that goes to show how there is a lack of respect for police because of their harmful and negligent actions taken regarding cases of MMIWG2S as well as their overall treatment of Indigenous People throughout this province and throughout Canada. As previously discussed, Indigenous People have, since first contact, been dismissed and treated unfairly in negative and damaging ways. Further to the discussion of relationship building, the aspect of representation was discussed by the participants that can help to shift the narrative.

Addressing (Mis)representation

Participants felt that there needs to be strong and wide awareness of the issue of MMIWG2S in order to have preventative measures taken to stop the problem of MMIWG2S from continuing to happen. Policing campaigns should be made so that awareness can spread nationwide. Action should be taken in regard to missing person’s cases and murders of individuals. Participants felt that police are just not acting fast enough. Indigenous People should be looking inward and really be educated on the history in order to help prevent this from continuing, so that “we can do our part in regards to ending this crisis” (author, date, p. #). A recommendation made was that first contact should be by a social worker or advocate, rather than dealing first-hand with police. Family members often do not want to call police to report their loved ones missing or want to have initial contact with police surrounding the death or

disappearance of their loved one due to negative experiences with police. As previously discussed throughout this work, there is a definite disconnect between police and the Indigenous community. Most individuals would rather not have to deal with police, due to widespread distrust and the harmful and damaging treatment of police to both victims and families. Participants recommended that there should be another method to offer supports and services in regard to information or updates that are not currently part of the police service so that people do not have to deal with the police at all.

Stronger Focus on Families

In speaking with the participants, it was agreed that families feel that they are not prioritized in the process with policing when investigations are handled. This hinders the healing process for families, as they are stuck in a cycle of the unknown. This idea brought on the discussion of withholding information from families by police. This practice is widely used within murder and missing investigations to keep the investigations private, as police do not want to release a lot of information that may corrupt an investigation. However, it was suggested that there should be something that mitigates this for families. Families need to know details of their loved one's death and/or disappearance, regardless if it gives leads to the investigation or maybe information that the police do not want the public to know. It was suggested that this risk can potentially be mitigated by having release documents that are signed by family members so that they agree they will not release that information to other parties in order to not corrupt the investigation.

Grass Roots Movement

The conversation within the Sharing Circle quickly turned to how families can be better supported throughout the process of the investigations of their missing or murdered loved ones. It was stated that grassroots movements in Winnipeg have been very effective in creating a movement of activism for MMIWG2S and creating awareness as well as supporting family members. We felt that grassroots should be involved in that circle. Family members who are impacted, the loved ones of our stolen sisters, should be involved within discussions and action plans of things that are moving forward, especially in addressing the problem with police and moving things forward in the end. We all agreed that therapy, counselling, or trauma supports should be not only be offered to families but also be mandatory for those who are impacted.

These supports should be tailored to each individual, taking into account people's different beliefs, whether it's traditional or religious based.

One of the most important things discussed was that the trauma experienced with loss of life of a loved one in these situations needs to be recognized. These traumas should be made a priority that is recognized and addressed. There should be a point-of-contact for families who are impacted, someone they can talk to whenever the need strikes them. Each family deals with the loss of their loved one in a different way, and it impacts them very dramatically. Issues need to be addressed in a specific way. The current supports offered are not working and should be redeveloped by the community in partnership with police to ensure their effectiveness. One of the participants suggested that a body of work should be created that looks at the impacts of trauma through the lens of lived experience and loved ones of MMIWG2S. Support and healing have been the ongoing theme throughout the stories as well as within the Sharing Circle. Lack of support was the defining factor individuals gave as to why they did not engage with the National Inquiry.

One recommendation made was to create programs that should be set up to work on a community-to-community basis within each reserve to better support families and the loss of their loved ones. One that was mentioned was in Ontario (potentially Thunder Bay), as well as MKO⁵ (Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakinak), who advocate for MMIWG2S in the northern area of Manitoba. Organizations should help with removing barriers, building relationships, and building the strong relationship of trust that need to be built with policing. It was strongly suggested that counsellors need to be available to sit and talk with each individual, welcoming of all belief systems and families. It has been found that grassroots movements have been more successful in their attempts with working with families through the death, disappearance, and investigations of MMIWG2S.

Youth and Elder Focus

An important topic brought up by participants was the need to focus on a youth component in relation to MMIWG2S. A participants lovingly stated, "Look at our young people

⁵ Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakinak is the equivalent of northern Manitoba chiefs in the Cree language. Its mission is to maintain, strengthen, enhance, lobby for, and defend the interests and rights of First Nation people within its jurisdiction and to promote, develop, and secure a standard quality of life deemed desirable and acceptable by its First Nations without limiting the generality of the foregoing and the objectives of MKO.

as the ray of light that is going to shine on in our future.” Participants recommended that it is of utmost importance to look to young people in order to teach them about healing. The needs of youth need to be addressed early on to help begin a shift that will impact the youth in a positive way that stops them from falling into unhealthy patterns and being involved with the police force in negative ways. It was recommended that the police force should be addressing this component, specifically with a focus on MMIWG2S. A participant argued, “The old way of thinking and the old way of doing things needs to stop; it needs to end, and the powerful people who have been in charge need to step down in order to allow others to create change.” The participant further suggested the use of a grassroots movement with a youth focus.

An important component of this also related to the grandmothers. The strength and love of grandmothers is an important part of Indigenous community and collective healing. Indigenous grandmothers are seen as the matriarchs and have consistently led grass roots movements, teach youth, and are strong advocates. Indigenous community is known to take guidance from the traditional roles of grandmothers, and this is an integral part of a healthy community. Further strengthening this argument, partnering grandmothers with the children and the youth is a traditional practice that has proven to be very successful, which leads to having grandmother matriarchal leaders in roles that take action to address the problem of MMIWG2S in whatever form they find would be suitable in addressing the issue or building relationships with police. In addition to this recommendation, it was also stated that support should be put in place within each individual community on reserve that would give grandmothers or Indigenous organizations help to support families who are dealing with the loss of their loved one. This would allow support to help with respite for their children while they are in therapy, when they are having meetings with police, or when they are busy doing things related to funeral arrangements or memorial services, search parties, and such. This would be a beneficial area of support for families, whether it be a *grandmother* support worker or somebody who can help with things on an ongoing basis for the families, as the traumatic impact of the loss of their family is something that will not be addressed within the first week of losing their loved one. The idea of short-term support is problematic, as healing is a journey, and as we can see throughout the stories shared, families should have ongoing collective supports.

Healing

It was strongly recommended by the participants that healing and peace should be the main objective for families addressing the problem of MMIWG2S, preventative measures, and trying to rebuild after the horrific traumas of the loss of their loved one who has gone missing or murdered. Participants spoke at length suggesting that a key factor may be related to restorative justice⁶ practices. Families are often left without answers, or cases remain unsolved; families should have the chance to have police not only solve their loved ones` cases but to also have them facilitate restorative justice with the doer, if that is something that is wanted by the family. They felt this would be a big factor in order to find healing. Restorative justice should be high on the list of priorities when trying to build or repair broken relationships, in order for some type of justice to be restored or closure found for families who have been impacted by the doer in cases of MMIWG2S. The fact that cases continue to go unsolved leaves little justice to be found for families of MMIWG2S.

The Sharing Circle closed with a smudge after all recommendations and insights were shared. In closing this process in a good way, it was my responsibility to feast the berries that were offered to feed the loved ones we honoured in sharing our recommendations and the story collection process was completed.

⁶ Restorative justice is an approach to crime that puts the emphasis on the wrong done to individuals and communities, and focusses on “restoring” relationships, fixing the damage that has been done and preventing more crimes from occurring.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

The intention behind this work was to create space for the sharing of healing stories from the families of MMIWG2S who have not been included within the National Inquiry, in order to better understand their stories, help facilitate healing, and gain their recommendations for change in regards to policing in the investigations of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people. However, this work has uncovered so much more in relation to this problem.

Throughout the process of researching this topic, exploring my own self, identity, and healing as an individual who is impacted by the problem, I have described this process at length to many within the multitude of seasons and phases I have gone through writing this thesis. I explained how this work is more than a thesis in the pursuit of a master's degree. The context of calling it a "project" does not sit right with me as an "inside researcher" and an Ininiw Iskwew. I have repeated these words over and over throughout the past four years of study because I feel a deeper and much more significant connection to this body of work. I have been impacted by the issue of MMIWG2S for nearly 20 years, due to the murder of my own mother who was only 37 years old at the time of her death. This untimely and horrific happening has shaped my understanding of the world, the life of my child, our family, and spurred the pursuit of my education in both the Western academic sense and the spiritual, ceremonial, and Indigenous ways of knowing sense and my collective healing. My understandings of thinking, seeing, being, doing, and knowing who I am through the eyes of an Ininiw Iskwew (Cree Woman) have shaped this work and strengthened my identity as well as contributed to my own healing through sharing this work with others like myself who have been impacted by the crisis of MMIWG2S. This work is more than words on a paper; it is my contribution in partnership with those who have also shared their stories, in order to help address the problem and speak our truths to honour our loved ones, the numerous others who have and may come to be impacted in the future, as well as the countless lives who have been lost in the wake of this crisis. If there was a different word that encompasses the meaning of this work in Ininimowin, it would be Mitéh Atoské (Heart Work).

I was surprised with the findings of this work. I focused on the system of the police, in what I feel is a warranted and thoroughly explored understanding and theory, that they are the only body mandated to protect and serve our communities and investigate the deaths and disappearances of our loved ones. This work uncovered not only the data that proved and backed

up this theory, but it also showed how the historical and current relationship between Indigenous people and police has been strained since before the North West Mounted Police, almost since first contact. It showed that the loved ones of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people are not feeling supported by police, and there is a distinct correlation between this and the impact of this problem on the individuals who have lost loved ones. I feel this work showed how policing is disconnected from building close-knit relations between the families impacted and the uncovering of information of investigations, which ultimately works against families and their healing. This work moved away from its focus on police to uncover that healing is the direct connection between each and every one of the participants and myself. Honouring the names of our loved ones and acknowledging their passing is a huge part of the healing process, which was shared and explored within participants' stories to better understand the problem. It was found that policing cannot be attributed to the connection of healing and has almost been a deterrent or contribution to hindering the healing process. Although the police are a significant piece to the puzzle in addressing the issue of MMIWG2S, healing is ultimately what will help Indigenous People and our communities end the toxic cycles that have contributed to the problem of MMIWG2S. Land-based and ceremonial healing, as well as spirituality in both Indigenous culture and religious ceremony, was and is a contributing factor in helping to address grief and loss as explored through each and every story told by the participants.

This work has found that although the police are a significant piece of the puzzle to addressing the issue of MMIWG2S, systemic change is needed within all of the systems. The systemic change and collaboration is a significant piece, which would help to better support the needs of families and those impacted by the issue of MMIW2S. It may be that those systems will help to create partnerships and change within the strained and arduous relationships that have been built and developed with the police. It is evident that change cannot happen without the work and collaboration of multiple systems, and it was found that there is a distinct correlation between a lack of support for families impacted by the problem of MMIWG2S and policing. All participants in this study felt that there was a lack of communication and relaying of information with the police in the death or disappearance of their loved one. They felt that there should have been more availability to not only speak with the police, but there should also have been first-hand, in-person communication in order to calm their apprehension, anxiety, and fears and answer their questions. Some are still left with questions unanswered.

Regarding the process of the National Inquiry, participants felt that they lacked support in both participating and attending the overall inquiry process. They felt there was a distinct lack of connection in attending the process. All of the participants, including myself, felt that they lacked the collaborative family response to attend the inquiry. The females and I did not attend the inquiry because we felt unsupported and were not in the right time to be approaching family to speak about sharing our stories at the National Inquiry. Daniel, the male, did not attend the inquiry, as the immediate family of Tracy attended, and he did not collaboratively plan to attend alongside them, being that he was the ex-husband and their relationship was somewhat strained. These factors, which all stem from a lack of support, kept all of the participants and me away from attending the inquiry to share the stories of our loved ones. In further exploration, there were other reasons behind why each of the participants did not attend, including the lack of collaborated response between victim services, the inquiry, police services, families and loved ones of MMIWG2S, as well as the lack of counselling and services that would elicit healing for the families impacted. It was found that each of the participants found their own ways of seeking out counselling or services that would help them better navigate their own healing journeys. Each of the participants chose careers within the field of being helpers to further strengthen their own healing by helping others, ultimately addressing their healing in regards to the death or disappearance of their loved one.

It is clear that the complex problem of MMIWG2S has impacted the participants through a multitude of ways, which have been all been found to have links to the impacts of colonialism.

Each participant had a multitude of connections to colonial effects in the form of family being impacted by addictions and mental health concerns, family break downs, and child apprehension in family or involvement with either the child welfare system, the 60s scoop and/or residential school involvement, sexual abuse and/or family violence, and impacts of trauma that negatively impacted the lives of the victims. It is clear that these factors led to the participants' loved ones becoming missing or murdered, due to the years of negative impacts caused by these experiences. The impacts of colonialism are still being felt by the families of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people, and there is a collective need for healing in regards to MMIWG2S, as well as the ongoing impacts of colonialism. Through this work, it was found that the impacts of the problem of MMIWG2S have prompted these participants to seek their own healing through the work they now do, which has predominantly

been focused on helping within their home community, working for Indigenous-based organizations with, for, and by Indigenous people.

The limiting aspect within this study was the absence of Two-Spirit perspectives. Although I did connect with 2 individuals, they both stated that they were not in “a healed space” to come forward and honour their truth in this work. I believe this not only shines a light on the need for Two-Spirit participation in addressing this problem, but also the ongoing need for healing in the Two-Spirit community, in order to share their medicine and honor their truth to combat this crisis. In addition, it was also a challenge finding people who were interested in speaking and honouring their truths concerning police. The topic of police has been seen as a taboo topic. Due to the historic and current strained relationships between Indigenous Peoples and police systems, there are few individuals who find themselves in a position to speak and honour their truth in regard to their negative experiences with policing. It is quite common to hear individuals tell people, me included, to “be careful, or something may happen to you because you are investigating the police.” Whether this is a misconception or partial truth, many people do not believe it is safe to look closely at the police because of the treatment by which police handle not only missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-spirit investigations but also the cases of all Indigenous People as well as treatment within the justice system and adjoining systems. It is clear through recorded data that police have for centuries created complicit discrimination and bias against Indigenous Peoples, and in alignment of this notion, Indigenous Peoples are wary of working “against” them publicly. The racism, bias, and discrimination within the justice system is also a contributing factor discussed throughout this work and through the stories of the participants and may have contributed to the lack of individuals who may have wanted to participate, but did not feel they would not be judged, discriminated against, or scrutinized through the publishing of this document. Additionally, there was the potential harm or safety concerns they may have felt should they have participated within this study. The issue of policing itself has not been over researched or independently investigated, so many details are still to be heard and legitimized within recorded data. It is also important to note that the recording of data, which has been done by the policing systems, may continue to perpetuate the racial discrimination and bias against Indigenous People. In order to gain the needed data, it would need to be gathered by systems that are neither governed nor authorized to do so with, by, and for the policing systems.

The recommendations made within this study are not an exhaustive list and may overlap with the recommendations made within the National Inquiry's (2019) 231 calls to justice as well as the action plan that was released in June of 2021. As previously mentioned, there are 11 Calls to Justice which specifically target changes and developments aimed at policing. Namely building stronger relationships with Indigenous peoples and understanding their history, as well as developing an Independent, special investigation unit that investigates policing failures in regard to policing failures and the mistreatment of Indigenous peoples. This research found that collecting and documenting the participants' recommendations gave them a sense of acknowledgement and empowerment to be heard, which was largely missing for them due to their lack of participation within the National Inquiry. This document not only held space for these individuals to share their stories, but also identifies and addresses this gap of unheard voices who were not involved in the process of the National Inquiry. This document carefully and intentionally did not center itself around the National Inquiry as a specific goal, in order to show that there is much work to still be done to address this ongoing problem.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Poster

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH IN A

Masters of Arts in Indigenous Governance Study

THROUGH THE



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WINNIPEG

We are looking for volunteers who have loved ones who have gone missing or have been murdered and have not been involved in the National Inquiry to take part in a study of *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and Two Spirit people*.

As a participant in this study, you would be asked to: participate in interview/s and a sharing circle, in order to share your story and experiences about your loved one/s, as well as your recommendations for change in regards to police involvement.

Your participation is **entirely voluntary** and would take up approximately **6 hours** of your time over **2 days**. By participating in this study you will help us to **better understand your experiences with police action in the investigations of your loved ones death or disappearance**.

In appreciation for your time, you may receive an honorarium.

To learn more about this study, or to participate in this study, please contact:

Tammy Wolfe,
Graduate Student at the University of Winnipeg,
wolfe-t@webmail.uwinnipeg.ca

Appendix B: Interview Consent Form

Unheard Voices: Healing Stories of Refusal and Rebuilding for Families of MMIWG2S

I am a graduate student researcher from the University of Winnipeg, attending the Masters of Arts in Indigenous Governance program. I am studying the events in which families, who have not been included within the National Inquiry into MMIWG2S, have had with police. I will be documenting the stories, the events and the experiences you have had with the police following the death or disappearance of your loved one and how you feel about the events.

I'm glad you've indicated that you are interested in doing this interview. I hope that it's still OK with you. If it isn't, I will not continue. I would appreciate your allowing me to audio record an interview with you. The interview will probably take from 45 minutes to 3 hours. If we start the interview and you do not wish to continue, please tell me and you do not have to continue. If I ask a question or questions you don't want to answer, that is perfectly OK with me--you don't have to answer. You can also contact me if you later decide you don't want me to use the information you gave me. I will do my best to ensure that your information is removed from any presentation or publication that has not already happened.

DO YOU AGREE TO LET ME AUDIORECORD THIS INTERVIEW? yes/no Agreeing to audio recording is preferred as it is a necessary aspect for the research to occur, but it will not exclude people who do not consent to this part of the research.

Participation in this research study might be emotionally and/or psychologically distressing for some individuals. However, if the interview becomes difficult, due to the serious content, I have completed trauma training that has equipped me to deal with such an event. In addition, there will be support from an Elder if it is needed. I have also attached a list of after supports if you require ongoing support services within the community. If you think of any other risks, please bring them to my attention. The information I get from you may be used in my teaching and further research. It could be published in books or articles, and/or on the Internet. I may give public talks about it at events in Canada and internationally.

DO YOU AGREE TO LET ME USE THE FINDINGS IN THESE WAYS? yes/no Publication of research findings may occur and agreement to this aspect of the research is optional, however you may be excluded as a participant within this research study without an agreement to this aspect.

DO YOU WANT TO RESTRICT ANY OF THESE USES? yes/no
COMMENTS?

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Project: Unheard Voices: Healing Stories of Refusal and Rebuilding for Families of Missing and Murdered Indigenous women and girls and Two Spirit people who have not been involved in the National Inquiry

Interview Introduction: Tansi, my name is Tammy Wolfe and I am a student at the University of Winnipeg in the Master's of Arts in Indigenous Governance program. I am conducting research to learn about your story in regards to the disappearance or murder of your loved one. Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today and be a part of this research project. The purpose of this study is to collect your story and learn about police action in regards to the disappearance or death of your loved one. I will be audio recording this interview as it will be quite difficult to carry our conversation and take notes simultaneously. I hope that you will feel comfortable in sharing your story in its entirety, as there is no right or wrong answers when sharing how you think and feel about the topic. I would like to add as a reminder, that you may end the interview or not answer any of the questions if at any time you feel uncomfortable or unable to answer or would not like to share further details. We can pick a spot to sit and continue picking medicine or continue our discussion while walking; this decision is up to you. In addition, I would also like to remind you that what is discussed today is to be kept confidential.

Interview Questions:

1. We are speaking about your experience with your loved one/s death/disappearance, tell me your story...?
2. How do you feel about the police involvement within your loved one's case?
3. Is there anything that you would like to elaborate on that I should add?
4. Is there anything that you feel that you have missed that I should add?
5. Is there anything you would like to change or clarify?

Follow up questions will be decided on throughout the interview/storytelling process, which will be guided by the participants and their stories

Interview Context: I will conduct my research interviews outdoors on the land, in connection with Mother Earth. The interviews will be conducted individually with each participant, over the course of one day each, with the support of an Elder who will take us medicine picking. The course of one day each has been decided on in order to give each participant enough time independently to share their stories uninterrupted, without rushing the process as Indigenous protocol determines there is no set time period in which to collect medicine or tell ones story. One full day will be utilized in order to stay in alignment of this protocol. This process will provide the research participants the learning and understanding of the teachings relayed by the

Elder, but will also provide the participants with the ability to find land-based healing as they will have the opportunity not only to offer their stories, but to connect with mother earth and Indigenous land-based holistic ways of healing. Participants will have the option to sit and speak with me or continue walking and talking, in order to share their story with me. The participant may choose if they would like the Elder to attend the conversation between us or have them available after the discussion is complete.

Closing: I would like to thank you for your time and participation. I appreciate you participating and am grateful for your help with this. I look forward to meeting with you again soon. Do you have any final thoughts that you would like to share? If you have any questions I will be more than happy to answer them now or you may also contact me at a later time if you think of anything else or have further questions.

SHARING CIRCLE PROTOCOL

Project: Unheard Voices: Healing Stories of Refusal and Rebuilding for Families of Missing and Murdered Indigenous women and girls and Two Spirit people who have not been involved in the National Inquiry

Sharing Circle Introduction: Tansi, as you all know my name is Tammy Wolfe and I am a student at the University of Winnipeg in the Master's of Arts in Indigenous Governance program. I am conducting research to learn about your stories in regards to the disappearance or murder of your loved ones and also gain your recommendations for change. Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today and be a part of this sharing circle. The purpose of this study is to collect your stories and learn about your recommendations for change in regards to the police action taken in the disappearance or death of your loved one. I will be writing notes during this sharing circle to record the recommendations that are made. I hope that you will all feel comfortable in sharing your thoughts in their entirety, as there is no right or wrong answers when sharing how you think and feel about the topic. I would like to add as a reminder, that you may end your participation in the sharing circle or not answer any of the questions if at any time you feel uncomfortable or unable to answer or would not like to share further details; this decision is up to you. In addition, I would also like to remind you all that the sharing circle and what is discussed today is to be kept confidential and should not be shared with anyone outside this circle; however I cannot guarantee this in the event the details you discuss are disclosed to an outside party.

Sharing circle question

1. We are speaking about the experiences with the deaths or disappearances of our loved ones. If we could make recommendations to change the experiences that we have had with police in the investigations, what would they be?

Follow up questions will be decided throughout the sharing circle process, which will be guided by the participants and their stories, thoughts and feelings.

Sharing Circle Context: The sharing circle will be conducted collectively with all participants over the course of one day at space supplied by Ndinawemaaganag Endaawaad Inc.. The sharing circle will be conducted by me with all of the participants who were initially interviewed to allow for the sharing of knowledge to identify and share their recommendations for positive changes in regards to policing action in investigations of MMIWG2S. The sharing (talking) circle as outlined in Chilisia's book *Indigenous Research Methodologies*, will work in alignment with respecting each participants time to share uninterrupted and equally to each participant, to share their ideas respectfully with compassion and love for one another (2012).

Participants will have the option to share their thoughts and feelings in relation to the initial question and/or the previous participants sharing. They may choose if they would like to share or pass when it is their turn to speak. The Elder will be in attendance in order to be available during or after the sharing circle for participants to speak with. The sweat lodge ceremony will be conducted with all of the participants, who wish to participate, after the completion of the sharing circle. The participants will participate within the Indigenous sweat lodge ceremony that will introduce them to physical, mental, emotional and spiritual healing throughout the ceremony. It is my hope that these methods of healing facilitated by the Elder will give the participants the opportunity to continue their healing journey and share their knowledge with others, after the completion of the research project. This process will provide the research participants the learning and understanding of the teachings relayed by the Elder, but will also provide them the opportunity to find spiritual healing within the lodge as they will be connected with a new method of holistic ways of healing.

Closing: I would like to thank you all for your time and participation. I appreciate your participation and am grateful for your help. Does anyone have any final thoughts that they would like to share? If you have any questions I will be more than happy to answer them now or you may also contact me at a later time if you have further questions.

Appendix D: Counselling Services Available in Winnipeg for Follow Up and Continued Care

Emergency Crisis Lines

Klinik Crisis Line 204-786-8686 (everyone)
Mobile Crisis Unit 204-940-1781 (adults)
Youth Emergency 204-949-4777
Crisis Stabilization Unit (18 or under)
Crisis Response Centre 817 Bannatyne Ave (adults)

Klinik Drop-In Counselling

870 Portage Ave.
Winnipeg, MB

Community Drop-In Counselling hours:

- Monday, Friday, Saturday noon-4PM
- Tuesday and Thursday noon-7PM
- Closed Wednesday and Sunday
- Statutory holidays will affect these hours

Drop-In Counselling information line: 204-784-4067.

Women's Health Clinic

Provides counselling services for women:

- adult counselling (age 19 and up)
- teen counselling (ages 13-18)

Please call 204-947-2422 ext. 204 to set up an appointment with an intake counsellor.

Eyakeen Healing Centre

Offers traditional Indigenous holistic healing services
Address: 547 Notre Dame Ave, Winnipeg, MB R3B 1S2
Closes 4:30 p.m.
Phone: (204) 783-2976

Professional counselling services offering low-cost or free counselling in Winnipeg:

Aurora Counselling Centre: 204-786-9251 (sliding scale)

Aulneau Renewal Centre: 204-987-7090

Centre Renaissance Centre 204-256-6750 (bilingual, sliding scale)

Family Dynamics: 204-947-1401 (formerly called Family Centre)

Fort Garry Women's Resource Centre: 204-477-1123

Klinic Community Health Centre: 204-784-4059

Ma Mawi wi Chi Itata Centre (Aboriginal): 204-925-0300

Mount Carmel Clinic: 204-589-9475

North End Women's Centre: 204-589-7374

First Nations & Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line (toll-free, 24 hours/day)

Call 1-855-242-3310 for immediate, culturally competent, crisis intervention telephone support for First Nations and Inuit people of all ages. Counselling is available in English & French; also in Cree, Ojibway & Inuktitut on request.

Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada provides free counselling services with a referral from your family doctor from:

- registered psychologists;
- registered social workers with clinical counselling orientation;
- registered psychiatric nurses;
- registered psychotherapists;
- other regulated mental health providers permitted to practice by legislation.

Every 12 months, an eligible client can receive up to 22 hours of counselling performed by an enrolled provider on a fee-for-service basis (such as, individual, family or group counselling). Additional hours in the same 12 month period may be provided on a case-by-case basis.

If you're experiencing emotional distress and want to talk, call the Hope for Wellness Help Line at 1-855-242-3310 or the online chat at hopeforwellness.ca. It's toll-free and open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

More information contact your family doctor.