Exploring Drumming/Song and its Relationship to Healing in the Lives of Indigenous Women Living in the City of Winnipeg.

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Indigenous Governance degree.

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Master of Arts in Indigenous Governance Program

The University of Winnipeg

Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

December 2014

Abstract

This is an exploratory study on drumming/song and its relationship to healing in the lives of Indigenous women living in the City of Winnipeg. The participants of this study included urban-based Indigenous women actively involved in drumming and song. An Indigenous research framework was employed using the drum as methodology in exploring and understanding Indigenous ways of knowing and being. The researcher used Indigenous searching methods ("talking circles" and the "Anishinaabe-Symbol Based Reflection" activity) to gather the women's personal stories as they related to the topic of the study. The women identified the healing benefits of drumming/song from a holistic perspective, meaning emotional, mental, physical, and a central focus on the spiritual dimension. The outcome of the study demonstrates that *Dewe-i-gan* (drum) provides a holistic healing approach within the lives of the women based on Indigenous ways of seeing, understanding, and being in the world that extends beyond the mere act of drumming.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I want to honour and say *ékosáni* to Creator, to God, to the One who has made this all possible; without her my life would be meaningless. I give honour and thanks to my parents who tried their best to give their children a better life than they had; for this, I am grateful. I say ékosáni to my spouse Brett, and daughter Amelia, who have been kind, patient, and understanding even when I was not. The ongoing love and support of my family has carried me forward on this journey.

I want to honour the women who believed in the study and were willing to share their personal stories and knowledge in making the research come alive. Their generosity has made this study possible. I am grateful to my advisor, Dr. Gabriel Nemogá-Soto, who challenged, supported, and pushed me forward to complete the thesis when I doubted I could. Dr. Jerry Fontaine taught me about courage and how to step outside the strict parameters we sometimes find ourselves in. Dr. Carolyn Kenny, who has reignited and reaffirmed my love of the arts through the work she has done, and the guidance she has generously provided. I would like to acknowledge and thank Dr. Yvonne Pompana who generously gave of her time to review and edit my paper, and Jennifer Schweder for copy editing and formatting.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the Department of Indigenous Studies and the Faculty of Graduate Studies at the University of Winnipeg for their generous financial support.

Dedication

> "My people will sleep for one hundred years, but when they awake, it will be the artists who give them their spirit back." -Louis Riel, July 4, 1885**,** Manitoba Metis Federation

I dedicate this completed work to all the women musicians, singers, drummers, dancers, artists; the creative ones who stretch and sustain us, who bring joy and beauty to a world in dire need of her sacred force. ékosáni *Iskwéwak.*

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Chapter One: Introduction

Locating the Researcher

Tanísi, Margaret Tamara Dicks *nitisinihkáson* (Hello my name is Margaret Tamara Dicks). It is important that I begin by locating myself as part of this research project so the reader may have some understanding of who I am and why this study is important to me. Absolon (2010) uses the medicine wheel framework to discuss "Indigenous Wholistic [*sic*] Theory." The "Eastern Door" is where all things start, and is the place I start this research process by sharing who I am and who I am not (Absolon, 2010). The justification for my research project is both personal and academic. Understanding my history as an Indigenous person has been a long journey of discovery and rediscovery of identity, of place, of location. Much of my conscious understanding as an Indigenous person has culminated in my adult life. I was born in Churchill, Manitoba to an Oji-Cree/Cree Métis woman from the Misipawistik Cree Nation (formerly Grand Rapids First Nation), Manitoba, and a non-Indigenous man of English and, I believe, Scottish descent. I am First Nation and belong to the Peguis First Nation on Treaty 1 Territory, the home of my maternal grandfather.

In 1987 I went to Vancouver, where I was accepted into the Music Therapy program at Capilano College. In 1993 I returned to school, branching off into Social Work at the University of British Columbia, and in 1995 moved back to Winnipeg to do my Master of Social Work (MSW) at the University of Manitoba. Much of the work I have done over the years as a music therapist, counsellor, and educator has revolved around being a witness and trying to help people through heartbreaking experiences. My work has primarily been with women and children (both Indigenous and non-

Indigenous), in the areas of trauma, sexual abuse, addictions, depression, anxiety, loss, and terminal illness. There came a point in my career when I asked myself whether I wanted to continue working in this capacity, as I simply felt worn out and began to question my ability to be an effective helper. Rather than succumb to the temptation of changing my career path, I began changing my focus and asking different questions, paying closer attention to what my own heart was telling me, and trusting in my own ways of thinking about the world. I have gained much from my formal education; it has exposed me to new ideas, but, like Steinhauer (2002) stated, it has been only a "partial education." In Steinhauer's 2002 article, she cited a statement shared by Weber-Pillwax, which spoke to my own struggles in academia.

> I am still struggling to eliminate the schooled tensions that I acquired in believing that every question has one right answer, so I am always waiting for the thinking to stop, for that one glorious, culminating second when I know the whole answer to one question. I have been relearning that moment will not come, at least not while I am in thinking mode. I am also realizing that I must have learned to trust other thinkers or, at least, relearned to trust my own thinking. (p. 69)

"Relearning to trust my own thinking" is what I have been struggling with throughout this educational journey, as well as learning to value what I see as important, as relevant to my own cultural imperatives. Prior to my attending the Indigenous Governance Program, stories of strength, leadership, and healing of Indigenous women were sorely minimized in, or completely left out of, the literature and discussions I was expected to learn. If mentioned at all, information was presented through a "deficit paradigm in which social pathologies are often the focus of research and media stories on Aboriginal peoples" (Wesley-Esquimaux & Calliou, 2010, p. 3).

As previously stated, my exposure to the arts began in the field of Music Therapy. Although I went into the field of social work, I always felt that music was my first calling. Once I completed a MSW degree, I started singing lessons and eventually completed a program called "Vocal Psychotherapy" with Dr. Diane Austin, who developed a music therapy approach using the voice to heal from trauma and other psychological issues.

In addition to vocal work I have attended drumming workshops as part of my exploration of the drum for healing, and also for recreational purposes. During the summer of 2013, I attended a multicultural drum retreat called *Rhythm of Your Soul: A Healing Drum Retreat* in Colorado, lead by Christine Stevens. As a counsellor in one place of employment, I participated whenever I could in the monthly "Women's Full Moon" drumming circles. Full moon drumming recognizes and celebrates women's life-giving gift, and is held on the full moon of each month to mark the occasion. In addition, I have attended pow-wows from Prince George, British Columbia to Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan, and locations in Manitoba, and experienced other Indigenous healing ceremonies over the years. I attended my first Sun Dance ceremony as a helper this past summer in Grand Rapids, Manitoba, where my mother was born; this was an experience full of ceremony and music that I continued to process in the weeks following the event. All these experiences have brought me to where I am today.

All of this has led me to the present moment, working at my MA in Indigenous Governance with the song of music in my ear that beckons me back to the gift Creator has given me. One of my intentions in doing this study was to give a textual voice to Indigenous women who are actively engaged in healing through traditional practices,

or, in this case, in drumming and song. By doing so, I want to honour my own gift as well as the gifts of the study participants; women who embarked on their own healing journeys using the drum and song. Throughout this process, I hope to develop a deeper understanding of Indigenous epistemology, ontology, and methodology as they relate to the drum and the relationship between drumming/song and healing. Kenny (2006) highlighted:

> When the women are able to build on their strengths, continue to improve the quality of their lives, and obtain position in society, the nations will heal. The voices of Aboriginal women are consistently pushed to the margins by powerful forces in a society that are unable to hear them for various reasons. (p. 551)

I absolutely believe this to be true. I have seen it here in Canada and as far South as Colombia. In spite of Indigenous women's voices being "pushed to the margins," women continue to engage in healing, resistance, and peace. When the women begin to regain their power, great things begin to happen.

Now let us continue our journey in the East of the Medicine Wheel. "Waabinong, in the east, also implies knowing our history: cultural and colonial" (Absolon, 2010, p. 79). I would now like to discuss some historical events as they relate to these teachings of the East. In Chapter 2, the Literature Review, I will discuss the following topics: Indigenous worldview; drum types; importance of the drum; Indigenous stories celebrating the feminine; Post-European contact; government attack on ceremony & music; and end the chapter with the topic of Indigenous women and drumming.

Refer to Appendix D for a visual representation of the framework I have used to organize this thesis.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Indigenous Worldview

The arts reflect the language, knowledge, worldviews, and ways of life of a people (Elwafi, 2008). In *anishinabemowin*, Fontaine (2013) refers to "ways of knowing" as *nah-nah-gah-dah-wayn-ji-gay-win*, meaning how we come to think this way about our reality as Anishinaabe people or as human beings. *In-nah-di-zi-win* refers to ontology, and means "our way of being and our way of life" (Fontaine, 2013, p. 3). These concepts lay the foundation for developing an understanding of this research study. Although the study is not solely from an Ojibway-Anishinaabe perspective, it does include many of the Ojibway-Anishinaabe teachings specifically related to drum teachings.

Although not all Indigenous groups are the same, I would suggest that there are overarching values or principles that Indigenous peoples share, such as viewing the world holistically, emphasizing the importance of relationships, inclusive of and beyond person-to-person, extending to all of Creation (Absolon, 2011; Hill, 2006; Wilson, 2013). From this perspective, "all life is considered sacred and all life forms are considered to have a spirit" (Absolon, 2011, p. 31). With such a high value placed on relationality, this principle carries with it certain responsibilities. Little Bear (2000) explained the important role Indigenous people have in the maintenance of Creation. He stated that in order for Creation to continue, it must be renewed through stories, ceremonies, etc. Little Bear (2000) also emphasized that "values and customs are the participatory part that Aboriginal people play in the maintenance of Creation" (p. 81). In the article "Keeping the World in Balance–Music Therapy in a Ritual Context,"

Kenny (2002a) highlighted similar beliefs that the Navajo Nation has in relation to their sacred responsibilities. The Navajo people believe that they have a "responsibility to beautify the earth . . . beautifying the Earth is a moral obligation and the essential goal of one's life if one is to lead a good life" (Kenny, 2002a, p. 1).

Therefore, from this perspective, Dewe-i-gan has an important role, and drumming and song can be seen as part of this participatory maintenance. The act of drumming then goes beyond healing at the individual level, extending to healing of the larger world, to all of Creation. In Wilken's (2005) study, she challenges what she refers to as the "music-audience dichotomy" evident from a more western approach to music: The music is played to entertain the masses. Through Wilken's research, she discovered that the function of drumming and song within the lives of three BC First Nation people was to keep their family songs alive. The songs carried the history and traditions of their communities; they maintained relationships within their community, with their ancestors, and with their future generations. Wilken (2005) shared that "songs lose their meaning and purpose without the mediations of ceremony and celebration and ultimately cease to exist" (p. 43). The Ahousaht people have what is referred to as a *tupati*, which Wilken (2005) described as the physical and spiritual resources of a family. Within this tupati are songs, dances, and ceremonies that are shared during communal gatherings like the potlatch (p. 27).

The participants of this study were women who self-identified as Indigenous (i.e., First Nation, Métis, or Inuit) and lived in the City of Winnipeg. According to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, in 2011, 56% of Aboriginal people lived in urban Canadian cities, with the largest population in Winnipeg.

Unfortunately these government statistics only reflect the term Aboriginal, which includes the Métis, First Nations, and Inuit, but which tell us nothing about the individual Nations. Alfred & Corntassel (2005) argue that the term Aboriginal (or its equivalent in other countries, such as a name assigned to any "ethnic group") is a powerful assault on Indigenous identities (p. 599). The authors went on:

> the continuing colonial process pulls Indigenous peoples away from cultural practices and community aspects of "being Indigenous" towards a political-legal construction as "aboriginal" or "Native American," both of which are representative of what we refer to as being "incidentally Indigenous." (p. 599)

For the purpose of this paper I have chosen to use the term Indigenous when referring to First Nation, Métis, Inuit, or Native American people of North America. The reader will find terms like Ojibway-Anishinaabe, Aboriginal, Native, Ojibwé, Dakota, Cree, Inuit, Métis, and Native American depending on the source being cited for this paper. When sharing local information on history, cultural practices, and teachings I will name the Nation accordingly. Whether the term is more global (Indigenous) or specific to the Nation (Ojibway-Anishinaabe), they are all reflective of the people living in the United States (US) and Canada.

As a starting point for my literature review I would like to briefly introduce three types of drums. This will be followed by a discussion on how Dewe-i-gan is integral in exploring Indigenous epistemology and ontology primarily—but not exclusively—from an Ojibway-Anishinaabe worldview.

Dewe-i-gan and Her Purpose

I would like to begin by introducing the reader to three types of drums that I feel are relevant to this study. The first drum is what is known as the "big drum" or "pow-wow drum"; it also has been referred to as the "Grandfather Drum" (Goudreau, 2006).

It is a larger drum that several people can sit around, and is primarily played at large gatherings like the celebratory pow-wow gatherings. Browner (2004) opined that the term "pow-wow" came from the Narragansett word *pau wau*, which means "he/she dreams" (p. 27). Vennum (2009) also spoke about the existence of a "women's dance drum," which is related to the big drum, but slightly smaller in size. Valaskakis (2005) has spoken about coming across a women's drum from her father's collection after he died. She spoke with two elders who both claimed that the drum was a social drum and not religious (Valaskakis, 2005, p. 190).

The second drum is the "Little Boy Water Drum" used by the *Midéwiwin* or Grand Medicine Society (Valaskakis, 2005). The drum, song, and use of the rattle are central to the healing ceremonies that take place at the Midéwiwin gatherings. The water drum is constructed out of a hollowed out log with animal skin stretched over the top.

The third drum is a hand drum that varies in size and has skin stretched over one side of the drum; sometimes it is referred to as the "Grandmother Drum." "Prior to the coming of the big drum, Aboriginal people accompanied their dances as well as healing ceremonies, games and even warfare with hand drums" (Goudreau, 2006, p. 9).

According to Dr. Jerry Fontaine (personal communication, September 3, 2014), there are many different names for drum in the anishinabemowin language. One such term is the *gimishoomisinaan*. Fontaine explained that "When you use the term gimishoomisinaan in prayer and song, you're calling upon and/or acknowledging the grandfathers." The term he used for drum was Dewe-i-gan, which he referred to as a more simplified term, and is the term I have been using thus far.

Who am I: Dewe-i-gan

Dewe-i-gan (drum) has always played an important role within Ojibway-Anishinaabe culture. To the Anishinaabe Nation, Dewe-i-gan held such importance that historically when an owner of a drum died, their drum was buried with the person (Vennum, 2009). It was said that the drum was needed,

> For the four day journey to the land of the dead. . . . He would know he was approaching the village of souls when he heard the drum. The Northern Lights are even conceived as a being of souls (Chee-jauk) of the departed, dancing to the beat of the drum. (Vennum, 2009, p. 33)

Dewe-i-gan played an integral role in spiritual matters and to this day continues to be used in prayer and ceremony. Eddie Benton-Banai, an Ojibway-Anishinaabe spiritual leader, has said that the Creator once said "I will never leave you" and the fact that the drum is still here is evidence of the Creator's promise ("Pow-Wow Trail Video Series: Episode 1", produced by Torrie, 2004). Benton-Banai continued by emphasizing that the drum is the heartbeat of Creation and is thus the Creator's beating heart. Benton-Banai continued,

> The drum also reminds us of who we are as Anishinaabe. Even if you did not grow up learning about the culture and you were totally disconnected through adoption or what have you, when you first hear the drum the blood memory of who you are comes back, the drum reminds you of this. (Torrie, 2004)

As there are so many teachings of the drum, the drum can be viewed as a methodology of coming to understand Anishinaabe ontology and epistemology. According to Benton-Banai (1988), the *Mi-tig-wa-kik day-way-gun* (water drum) was constructed on the fourth day of the preparation of the first Midéwiwin Ceremony (p. 68). Benton-Banai continued, "The Waterdrum [*sic*] represented all that was necessary for life. It embodied both the physical and spiritual" (p. 68).

The physical aspects of the drum have many teachings. The body of the water drum is similar to the big drum and is made of wood, "symbolic of all our plant brothers and sisters with whom we must learn to live in a respectful way" (Benton-Banai, 1988, p. 70). The hide "represents and honours all of our four legged brothers and sisters" (Benton-Banai, 1988, p. 70). You learn from the animals what it means to share, as they have sacrificed themselves for your healing. The head of the water drum is attached with a hoop and "the hoop represents the Sacred Circle in which all natural things move" (Benton-Banai, 1988, p. 70). The circular nature of the drum is symbolic of the circle of life teachings and "reminds us that we are all one; we are all interconnected spiritually" (Goudreau, 2006, p. 24). Tobacco is one of the sacred medicines and is used in ceremony and prayer in communicating with Creator, and this is sprinkled into the water of the water drum during its making (Benton-Banai, 1988). The water placed in the drum represents the blood of Mother Earth, "that flows through her, carries food to her, and purifies her" (Benton-Banai, 1988, p. 70).

Benton-Benai (1988) shared,

> After the Water drum was tied, the old man pulled a plug out of a hole in the wooden shell. He held the drum up to the Creator and blew his breath into the drum. This he did to represent the life-giving breath of the Creator, that breath to which all life is ultimately linked. (p. 71)

In relation to the work Whidden (2007) has done with the Cree, she stated,

> At the heart of the pow-wow is the drum; it symbolizes Mother Earth, the Sun (God), and the cycle of life. . . . the drum was a communication system between the people and the Creator, Gichi Manitou … the drum is treated with respect, since the wooden frame is alive, and the hide membrane represents the animals who give their lives for us and from whom humans learn the meaning and value of sharing. (p.108)

Through the teachings of Dewe-i-gan, we learn that we are all one; we are all connected, including all of Creation. We are reminded that life is circular; our seasons, and the four sacred elements. She (Dewe-i-gan) teaches us about the different life stages we go through and much more. Through Dewe-i-gan we learn the importance of connectedness. Hill (2006) described belonging as part of the concept of connectedness:

> Thus, sense of belonging as connectedness occurs through the dynamics of relationships between everything in the creation/universe. It is a deep spiritual connection to family, community nature, the Creator, land, environment, ancestors, and traditional ways of life. (p. 212)

Dewe-i-gan provides us with a way to communicate with Creator/God and each other. Owning a drum consists of learning proper protocol on how to take care of your drum, and how one must behave around the drum. Fontaine (2013) has spoken about how highly structured and organized drum societies were and how this reflected Anishinaabe societies as a whole (p. 25). There were many different roles and responsibilities for the members of the drum society, including: Drum Owner; Chief; Head Speaker; Sweeper; Warriors; Head Singer; West Stake; North Stake; East Stake; Pipe Tender; Tobacco Pouch Tender; Drum Heaters; and Support Singers (Fontaine, 2013, pp. 25-26).

Historically, the drum has been used as a tool for peace, intended to promote harmony within and between people, as well as within the environment in which we live. In the story of the origins of the big drum, the Dakota Nation presents the big drum to the Ojibway Nation in order to promote harmony and peace between the two warring groups (Johnson, 1982).

In this section I have shown the reader how the drum teaches us about Indigenous epistemology and ontology. I would now like to draw your attention to the historical role Indigenous women played in their communities, followed by a brief explanation of the impact colonization has had on Indigenous women, as well as on ceremony and drumming.

Indigenous Stories Celebrating the Feminine

Prior to European contact Indigenous women were valued and respected for the roles they held within their communities. This does not mean every woman was equally valued within her tribe, but, as Anderson (2000) highlighted, "the tribes see women variously, but they do not question the power of femininity" (p. 36). Kenny (2002a) shared, "traditionally, in most Aboriginal Societies, women were the caretakers of the moral character of the community" (p.1). This is evident in various stories and legends that highlight the importance of women (Mihesuah, 1996). For instance, the "White Buffalo Calf Woman" was responsible for bringing the peace pipe to the Dakota and Lakota people (Hamilton & Sinclair, 1991; Anderson, 2000). The story of how the big ceremonial drum came to the Sioux people was born of the vision of Tail Feather Woman, which I will discuss more fully in another section of this paper.

In Portman and Garret's (2005) article, "Beloved Women: Nurturing the Sacred Fire of Leadership from an American Indian Perspective," they used the story of the little sister water spider to explain leadership within the Cherokee Nation. In spite of her size and the lack of confidence others initially had in her abilities, little sister water spider was able to bring the first fire back to her people (p. 285). She was able to do

this based on her creativity, ability to listen to her people, perseverance, humility, and a desire to be of assistance to her community.

Simpson, in her book, *Dancing On Our Turtle's Back* (2011), shared the story about Gezhizhwazh, "to try to cut", who sacrificed herself to the Wiindigo as a way to disrupt their plans on destroying her people (p. 71). Simpson (2011) went on to say that "the Gezhizhwazh stories provide a theoretical foundation for the resistance that places strategy and intelligence at the core of the model. Gezhizhwazh was not physically stronger than the Wiindigo but she was smarter, more cunning, strategic, and committed to achieving her goal" (Simpson, 2011, p. 72).

These are only a few stories that honour the feminine in Indigenous societies. Women were not seen as above or below anyone; each person, male or female, had a role and a place within the community, and roles were flexible depending on the needs of the community (Anderson, 2000).

Prior to European contact, in some Nations, women had significant political sway. The Haudenosaunee Confederacy was matriarchal and remains so today (Haudenosaunee Confederacy). Women were highly respected and valued within their communities (Spillet, 1990). As outlined in the Great Law of Peace "women shall be considered the progenitors of the nation. They shall own the land and the soil. Men and women shall follow the status of their mothers" (Great Law of Peace, n.d.). In other words, Haudenosaunee women held much political and economic power within their Nation. Anderson (2000) highlighted that, like the Haudenosaunee, the Sto:Lo women of the Fraser Valley, BC area had a similar political role in that "the women

were able to choose the chiefs, and women were able to fire the chiefs" (p. 66) if the leaders were not acting in accordance with the best interests of their community.

Tragically, through the process of colonization, the value of women began to diminish, as I discuss in the next section.

Post-European Contact

The attack on Indigenous women's respected roles and value began with the arrival of Europeans and their laws. The *Indian Act* (1876) had a profound impact on Indigenous women's value and roles within their Nations (Hamilton and Sinclair, 1991). Kenny (2002b) cited Teresa Nahanee, as having highlighted:

> The Indian Act imposed a system of patriarchal customs and laws on First Nations communities that has become so ingrained among First Nations peoples that it stripped women of gender equality and created male privilege as the norm on reserve lands. (p. 4)

The law prohibited women from voting, from holding political office, from owning property; they could not speak at public meetings nor enter into any contracts (Hamilton & Sinclair, 1991; Anderson, 2000).

In addition to the *Indian Act*, the Europeans also established the residential school system, with a belief system based on a distorted view of Christianity. The fact that many children were sexually, physically, emotionally, and psychologically abused during the residential school era is well documented, and has been highlighted through the Truth and Reconciliation process (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada) and other sources (Miller, 1996). On a personal note: according to my mother, my grandfather ran away from residential school because of the abuse he witnessed while attending the school. What also took place during the latter part of the residential school era was what has been referred to as the '60s Scoop in which many Indigenous

children were taken into foster care and adopted out to non-native families, some outside of the country resulting in further cultural and community breakdown (Hamilton & Sinclair, 1991). This was the situation for two of the participants in this study.

Let me draw your attention to how the process of colonization impacted the use of music within Indigenous Nations.

Government Attack on Ceremony and Music

Colonization and the subsequent policies that were put in place to assimilate Indigenous peoples had a negative impact on their music and ceremonies. Pettipas (1994), in *Severing the Ties That Bind: Government Repression of Indigenous Religious Ceremonies of the Prairies,* discussed the impact legislation had on Indigenous people's ability to participate in cultural ceremonies. Pettipas (1994) highlighted that there were many fears, and assumptions that the settlers and authorities had regarding Indigenous ceremonies and dance. She emphasized that there were three main reasons why dancing and musical expression were opposed by government. First,

> There was a general fear amongst the Settlers that large gatherings were political in nature and were afraid of uprisings against them; secondly, Indigenous peoples attending these events were not adhering to the white protestant work ethic as they were leaving their crops for days at a time (in order to attend the ceremony) and lastly the government did not want cultural [*sic*] and tradition passed on to future generations. (p. 103)

Due to the attempts of the colonial government and missionaries to repress ceremonies and expression through traditional music, "many (Indigenous) people came to believe that cultural activities such as drumming, dancing, and ceremonies as [*sic*] evil, and felt threatened by the people in the community who continued to practice them" (Broad, Boyer, & Chataway, 2006, p. 43). Valaskakis (2005) wrote about

inheriting a water drum from her father after he passed and the stir this created in her community. She wrote,

> Today, the drum is wrapped in white cloth and stored in a safe place. Like the reservation and its tribal members, this Midé drum is suspended in an interwoven maze of conflicting spiritual and ideological visions, caught in the cultural web of displacement, transformation, and acculturation that is remembered in contradictory testimonials to Chippewa tradition and practice. (pp.178-179)

On the basis of the spiritual belief system of various community members, Valaskakis (2005) has spoken about the differences of opinion shared in the community with regard to how the drum should be handled; a conversation full of emotion and historical significance. The government knew that the drum represented a special role in the ceremonial lives of Indigenous peoples. Vennum (2009) stated, "Because the drum served to remind the Ojibwa of his identity, it became a nuisance to those attempting to convert him to Christianity" (p. 33).

A similar colonizing situation occurred in the US between the mid-1800s and the 1930s (Belle, 2004). The US government tried to assimilate Indigenous people into the American "melting pot" by introducing private land ownership through the Dawes Act, 1887 and other legislation (Belle, 2004, p. 25). In 1887, the Bureau of Indian Affairs outlawed all gatherings. "The most infamous result of this law was the massacre at Wounded Knee Creek on Pine Ridge Agency in 1890" (Belle, 2004, p. 26). During the Coolidge administration (1923-1929), Charles Burke, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, had severely repressed dancing on reservations (Browner, 2004). Burke had what was known as the "Secret Dance File—a collection of reports on dance practices considered so obscene that it could not be openly circulated" (Ellis, 1999, p. 140).

In spite of the government's suppression tactics suppression, "Indian people continually thwarted the goals of the Indian office. Even at the worst period of federal suppression, no ceremony was interrupted for more than two years," (Ellis, 1999, p. 143). Although colonization severely disrupted the lives of Indigenous people, many of our people survived, resisted and flourished despite their external circumstances. Now I would like to draw the reader's attention to both the historical and contemporary role that drumming and song plays in the lives of Indigenous women.

Indigenous Women and Drumming

Prior to this study, it was my understanding that most women drummers historically played hand drums or the Little Boy Water Drum. In conducting research on women and the drum I have found information that supports my understanding, but also includes new information, that of a larger drum. Vennum (2009) talked about the women's dance drum, *ikwe-niimi'idiwin*, which was slightly smaller than the big drum. According to Vennum (2009), the accompanying dance was learned from the Sioux and originated in a dream (p. 86). The drum was given to the women "because she couldn't dance when the ceremonial was first put on the face of the earth" (Vennum, 2009, p. 86).

More and more, women are drumming on the big drum but continue to experience opposition within some Indigenous communities (Hatton, 1986). The reason for this opposition is based on the story of Tail Feather Woman and how the ceremonial drum came to the Sioux people through her vision. Following the death of her four sons from warring with the Europeans, Tail Feather Woman fled and hid in a lake. The Great Spirit approached her and gave her a vision, which was conveyed to

her over the course of four days. The Great Spirit taught Tail Feather Woman how to make a drum and sing songs, which were to promote peace and prevent the soldiers from massacring her people (Vennum, 2009). When the soldiers heard the drumming and songs, they put their weapons down and stopped the killing of her people. In another version of the story, the drum was also meant to promote peace between the Ojibway-Anishinaabe and the Dakota (Sioux) peoples as they also fought with each other and it was difficult to protect against the settlers when warring continued between the two Nations (Johnson, 1982). Eddie Benton-Banai said that historically speaking, the protocol was that the drum was given to the man and it was the women's role to hold the circle of the drum standing on the outside of the men (Torrie, 2004). He also said that there were women officers and that these women had their duties and responsibilities in relation to the drum and ceremony. Some men and women still hold to the teachings of Tail Feather Woman and do not feel that it is a woman's place to sit around the big drum (Goudreau, 2006).

There are also opposing views. One view highlighted here by a Mi'kmaq man named Paul Pike was quoted in *The Western Star* (Editorial, 2009) on the series, "Women: Reclaiming a place at the big drum?" His comment was,

> When the culture is in danger it is normal for women to break through their normal roles and do what it takes to keep the traditions and culture alive. . . . There were also the situations in WWI and WWII where the majority of men were gone to fight. The only ones to keep the songs and culture alive were the women. (Editorial: "Women," 2009)

In early 2000, there was a female drum group called Sweet Grass Road from Winnipeg who attended a graduation pow-wow being held at a University in St. Paul, Minnesota. The male drum groups did not want Sweet Grass Road playing the big

drum at the University's pow-wow and shunned the women's drum group. Ultimately, the University supported the men's demands and the women were not allowed to participate. The female drummers then took the University to court for sexual discrimination which created quite the sensation and opened up the discussion in Canada as to whether women should sit at the big drum (Goudreau, 2006).

Anderson (2000) has spoken about the ways in which tradition can be disempowering to women and how "tradition can further be used by Native men to build and maintain the sexism they have learned from the colonizer" (p. 37). "Lateral violence" is also a result of colonialism and internalized oppression. On the Native Women's Association of Canada's website, Jane Middelton-Moz (2011) is cited in defining lateral violence,

> When a powerful oppressor has directed oppression against a group for a period of time, members of the oppressed group feel powerless to fight back and eventually turn against each other.

Although the women of this study did not use the term lateral violence, they did speak to the issue, which will be highlighted in a later chapter.

Although sexism and lateral violence are issues for Indigenous women drummers, more women are feeling called to drum at the big drum, particularly the younger generation. During a personal conversation with Joan (a participant in this study) I was informed about a drum-teaching gathering that was held at the Thunder Bird House in Winnipeg this past year. The purpose of the gathering was to inform women on proper conduct and respect in relation to the drum. Elder Mae Louise Campbell of the Grandmother's Council in Winnipeg facilitated the gathering. According to Joan, sixty women, many of whom were young women, showed up to

learn about the teachings of the drum. Following this conversation I was left wondering whether the role and place of women drummers was drifting on the wind of change and whether the spirit of Dewe-i-gan had anything to do with it. In any case, that is for another time and another discussion.

Chapter Three: Clinical Perspectives and Gaps

Clinical Perspectives on the Relationship Between Drumming and Healing

In this section I would like to present the academic literature related to drumming and healing. The healing benefits of drumming, from a clinical perspective, have been well documented. Snow and D'Amico (2010) found that drumming had a positive impact on the youth participants in their study, in that the students expressed feeling more "open," and claimed they felt better about themselves.

Bensimon, Amir and Wolf (2008) conducted a study based on a music therapy-drumming group used with young soldiers who suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a result of being in combat situations. The experience of drumming in a group developed group cohesion, access to traumatic memories and cathartic release of strong emotions.

In their article, Lowey and Spintge (2011) discussed the issue of pain and how music can be used to modify pain. We know that music can influence emotions; so, if pain is somewhat subjective, in that our emotional response can add to or subtract from our pain, then there is potential that music has a role in decreasing pain. The authors continued:

> If music can provide for release (drumming), emotions (crying-endorphins elicited in tears-discharge) or alternatively can allow for expression (as in singing), or building of resilience (as in clinical improvisation), then the pain experience is malleable and can be altered and the psychophysiological experience manifested between therapist and patient can be a catalyst in shifting the experience of pain. (p. 70)

Goudreau (2006) stated that,

> Based on the natural phenomena of entrainment, it has been theorized that external rhythms, such as the sound of repetitive drumbeats, have the ability to

> realign internal body rhythms, hence slow steady drumming can possibly decrease our heart rate when we are under stress. (p. 19)

Again this supports the claim that drumming, and other forms of music, can assist in pain management as well as promote wellness through stress reduction. Ho, Chinen, Streja (2011); Maschi, MacMillan, and Viola (2012); and Camilleri, (2002) express support for the use of drumming as a tool to reduce stress, improve social supports, improve overall mood, and develop emotional and communicative skills. Winkelman (2003) found that drumming, in combination with other addiction treatment methods, was effective in reducing group conflict, reducing stress levels, and promoting emotional release (p. 1).

Drumming has also been associated with the altering of consciousness (Szabó, 2006; Moreno, 1995; Rouget, 1985). Owen (2012) supported this statement by highlighting that:

> Rhythm has the potential to change our brain wave patterns, more specifically, rhythm has been used in healing to enter altered states of consciousness, which become available when our brains resonate in an overall frequency range that lends to relative subjective experiences, namely calm, relaxed and meditative states. (p. 14)

In Iseke's (2013) interview with an Elder, the Elder described:

> Music as space where we can connect to the idea of vibrations, how vibrations change, and that by changing vibrations we can alter our realities. Through music we can develop initial understandings of the rudiments of this process perhaps in preparation for the ceremonial understandings yet to come. (p. 50)

In Pedri's (2011) thesis research she found that drumming and song created connection and promoted intergenerational understandings between the older group members and the younger ones.

Although the previous authors document a favourable outcome in relation to drumming and healing, there are cases in which drumming has not been helpful. For instance, in Snow and D'Amico 's (2010) study, the authors noticed students with Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) did not seem to benefit from the drumming as much as the other students who did not have ADHD or ADD.

It is sometimes difficult to say whether it was the drumming alone that produced the positive changes or whether there were other factors that influenced the results. For example, was it the individual therapy the young soldiers received outside of the drumming sessions that created the real change? It can be very difficult to attribute cause and effect with absolute certainty. Although this study is not interested in cause and effect, it is still important to highlight these issues in trying to understand the relationship between drumming and healing.

Although there seems to be a relationship that exists between drumming and healing, there is limited literature on my specific study which I will now draw to the reader's attention.

Gaps in the Literature

As Goudreau, an Indigenous scholar, discusses in her thesis (2006), there is little research on the relationship between hand drumming and health promotion, and "that the health benefits of traditional activities have not been fully explored" (p. 29). In my literature search I did not find any studies specifically related to Indigenous women, drumming/song and healing conducted in the City of Winnipeg.

Chiang (2008) emphasized that although ethnomusicologists showed some interest in healing music within Indigenous cultures, they

> [S]eldom contributed their knowledge to research oriented health care research. Music therapists, on the other hand, have been focusing on the pragmatic use of music for the benefit of the patient, but rarely relate their healing practices to shamanic healing or other Indigenous healing methods as associated with music. (p.1)

Indigenous scholar and music therapist, Kenny (2006a) has spent the last 30 years bridging Indigenous healing practices and contemporary music therapy practice in a way that is mindful of the risks associated with misappropriation of Indigenous knowledge. Kenny (2002b) stated,

> If music therapists are to seriously consider culture and if any of us are hoping to bring traditional music therapists into honest and respectful post-colonial discourse with professional music therapists, we must hear more than the voices of non-indigenous academics. (p. 9)

I would agree with Chiang that many music therapists have neglected Indigenous musical healing practices. So while there is literature on music and healing, there is little literature on the topic I have chosen for this study, which is drumming and healing with Indigenous women in the City of Winnipeg. Moreno (1995) stated:

> There are many parallels between modern music therapy and the role of music in traditional cultures . . . parallels can be seen between the therapeutic uses of music in imagery to induce altered states of consciousness in music therapy practice and music to assist in triggering the trance state in shamanism and spirit possession . . . unfortunately, the music therapy profession has not made more than a token effort to understand and develop these connections. (pp. 331-332)

Fly (2010) supported these previous statements by emphasizing that "one of the cultures which has had very little research published by the music therapy and the music education professions on a national level is the Native American culture" (p. 3),

and much of the literature she presents are from non-Indigenous educators. She quoted one educator as saying that "pow-wow music is simply social music, and is therefore free reign for anyone to practice" (p. 10). Referring to this type of cultural expression as being "simply social music" dismisses the complexity and richness of this type of gathering (Ellis, 2003; Hatton, 1986).

Although there have been studies done on Indigenous healing methods from the fields of social work and counselling, typically the literature highlights guiding values and principles of Indigenous approaches, advocates for the integration or use of Indigenous healing practices, and/or discusses western versus Indigenous approaches to healing (Hill & Coady, 2003; Goforth, 2007). I found that any mention of drumming and song in relation to Indigenous urban-based women was sparse, if it was mentioned at all.

The study I am proposing recognizes that our people have always had the tools and cultural healing practices to pursue wellness and holistic healing (Hart, 2007). Archibald and Dewar (2010), in their article "Creative Arts, Culture, and Healing: Building an Evidence Base," provided strong evidence from data collected through the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF) that the many forms of creative arts have been important in the healing practices of Aboriginal communities. Some of the mentioned creative arts included music, drumming, singing, art, sewing, drum making, and dancing. I would also add that using traditional forms of healing, such as the drum, reflect and positively reinforce Indigenous identity (McCabe, 2007, p. 2). According to Chandler and Lalonde (1998) a strong Indigenous identity and cultural continuity has been said to protect against high rates of suicide in Indigenous communities.

The drum/song has played an important role in healing and will be the focus of this study. Historically healing practices of Indigenous people have been written from a colonial outsider perspective. More literature has to be written by and with Indigenous communities, as a way to address this gap. This study sets out to address these issues. Before moving on to describe this study in more detail, let me briefly discuss the concept of healing from an Indigenous perspective.

Chapter Four: Framework

Circle of Life Framework

Healing, from an Indigenous perspective, encompasses more than just healing a specific ailment, but rather is viewed from a holistic perspective (Hart, 2007; Loiselle & McKenzie, 2006). Warne (2005), a Lakota physician, shared:

> With the word physician we are saying up front that we deal with the physical realm. The root of this word is physic, which is Latin for the natural sciences. So, as a physician, I am really a physical scientist focused on the physical realm of disease. (p. 125)

Healing from an Indigenous perspective is more than focussing on one area of being, but considers all aspects of the human being. The Medicine Wheel or circle of life framework is divided into four quadrants and each person is made up of the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual (Bopp, Bopp, Brown, & Lane, 1984). As seen in Figure 1, the quadrants are not separate components as the lines you see within the wheel connect each section with the other (Warne, 2005).

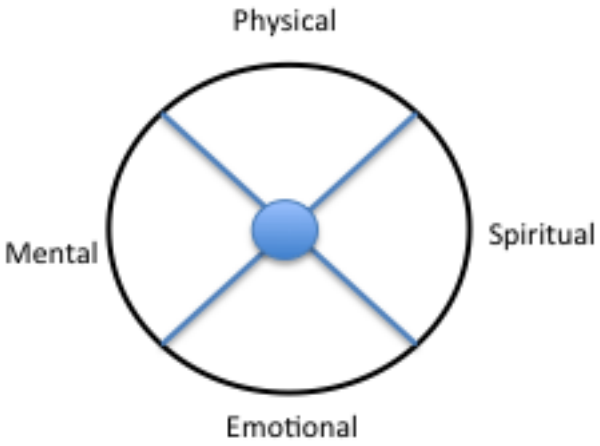


Figure 1: Medicine Wheel

Difficulties or dis-ease arise when, as previously mentioned, only one area is considered in the process of healing. From this view each of these quadrants must be addressed in order to find balance and wellness in one's life (Lavallée, 2007). To seek a more balanced life, we strive towards balancing ourselves within the center of the circle. This does not mean we will always remain there as life has a habit of pulling us in different directions. Finding balance in one's life is a process, not a state, and it is up to each person to find what meanings the circle of life framework can teach them. Hart (2007) cited Absolon to define healing as:

> A balanced relationship within oneself and with the earth and the natural and spiritual worlds. The principles of healing include going back to the teachings of the earth, confronting the dark side of life, recognizing the process of death and rebirth, and the restoration of balance. (p. 45)

As we leave the East of the Medicine Wheel we come to the Southern Door, which "encompasses the emotional and relational realms. . . . This doorway addresses issues of relationships, protocols, accountability, reciprocity, and community" (Absolon, 2010, p. 79). From my own understanding, I will discuss these issues as they relate to this study (refer to Appendix A for a visual snapshot of my framework). I start by drawing the reader's attention to the Indigenous framework and methods used in exploring the topic under study. In doing so, I address relationships (who the participants are and my relationship to the participants); protocol (how the study will be conducted); and accountability (how I will remain accountable to the participants and the community).

For this study I used two talking circles, Anishinaabe symbol-based reflection and a "drum journal" for researcher reflexivity. In using Indigenous methods of inquiry I show respect for Indigenous knowledge and ways of understanding the world.

Defining an Indigenous Approach: Foundational and Ethical Considerations

Similar to Absolon's (2010) Medicine Wheel teachings at the Southern Door, Kovach (2009) stated that,

> Indigenous research, flowing from the tribal paradigms, shows general agreement in the following broad ethical considerations: (a) that the research methodology should be in line with Indigenous values; (b) that there is some form of community accountability; (c) that the research gives back to and benefits the community to some manner; and (d) that the researcher is an ally and will not do harm. (p. 48)

Historically, Indigenous peoples have not been respected by Western researchers resulting in a general lack of trust between researchers and Indigenous communities (Iseke, 2011; Kenny, 2002a; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012). This lack of trust is a consequence of researchers who have disrespected Indigenous values and belief systems within their studies. Relationships, respect, honesty, accountability, reciprocity, sharing, harmony, and spirituality are important Indigenous values highlighted by Indigenous scholars (Hart, 2002; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Kovach (2009) states that "research like life, is about relationships" (p. 313). In other words you have to build and respect relationships; it is recognition of the sacred responsibility we have to each other, our Creator, and all living things. The researcher is not seen as someone who can remain objective, standing outside of the research process, but one who is an integral part of the process. It is a reciprocal relationship and it is the researcher's responsibility to discuss how their views, background, culture, etc., may shape the research study so as not to allow their cultural biases to go unchecked (Creswell, 2014). The more engaged you are in the research process, the less likely you are to be disrespectful to the community, as you have built relationships. It results in greater accountability and is a way to strive for harmonious relations. It will also likely

influence a researcher to want to "give back" (reciprocity) to the community, which again is an Indigenous value. A natural outcome of using an Indigenous research approach has been the personal development of the researcher, articulated by Hart (2007):

> Indigenous methodologies are those ones which permit and enable Indigenous researchers to be who they are while they are actively engaged as participants in the research process. This way of being not only creates new knowledge but transforms whom the researcher is and where she/he is located. (p. 129)

In summary, an Indigenous research design has been described as an approach that honours Indigenous values and beliefs and follows the ethical considerations as mentioned by Kovach (2009). From this foundation, one must then acknowledge and respect Indigenous ways of knowing and understanding the world (Lavallée, 2007). As a researcher, I worked at developing ethical relationships with the participants by following protocol (discussed under the recruitment section), and by conducting member checks, meaning once the stories were transcribed each participant received a copy of their story to make additional comments or changes. I also engaged in researcher reflexivity as the researcher does not stand outside of the study looking in, but is part of the relationship. In addition to following Anishinaabe protocol, the thesis proposal had to be approved through the University of Winnipeg Human Research Ethics Board. As a researcher, I also reviewed the document "Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP) or Self Determination Applied to Research" (Schnarch, 2004).

I will now explain the recruitment process followed by each of the methods I used within the study, sharing/talking circles, the Anishinaabe symbol-based reflection activity, and a personal "drum journal".

Indigenous Methods

Recruitment process. Participants were recruited through word of mouth and by attending the North End Women's Centre's weekly Buffalo Gals drum group to explain my study. Prior to the first talking circle I was in contact with nine women who expressed an interest in participating in my study. I met face-to-face with seven of the women. Two women I met briefly at the North End Women's Centre, where I left four information packages for women to pick up at the end of their drumming session. One woman asked if she could attend the second session, as she was going to be out of town during the first session. I said she could, but that she would need to get the art supplies from me prior to the second session; she never followed up. Another woman from the North End drumming circle followed up a couple of days after I visited the Centre. She contacted me by telephone, and expressed a keen interest in the study and had planned to attend, but did not attend the day of the first talking circle. The other five women I met in person in order to explain the study. Each participant was given an introduction letter and was asked to sign the consent forms prior to our first talking circle (see Appendix B for the introduction letter and Appendix C for the consent form). Two of the five women who signed the consent forms stated that they were not sure if they could make it to the first talking circle but would try. Neither of those two women showed for the first circle. I sent introduction letters through e-mail to the two women I knew prior to the study and had them sign the consent forms on the day of the first talking circle. In total there were seven women who signed consent forms but only five women showed for the first talking circle session and two for the second session. One of the women who was absent from the second talking circle contacted me through e-

mail. She expressed an interest in setting up another meeting in order to address the requirements of the second circle but after that initial contact, did not follow up.

The talking circles were held at Red River Community College. I had originally booked the Aboriginal Centre at the College, but two days before the talking circle was to take place, I was told that the Centre would not be available due to a power outage in that part of the building. We were still able to run the talking circles out of the College as another room that met our needs was offered. In order for two of the women to participate, childcare needs had to be considered. One single parent attended the talking circles with two of her children. A craft area with snacks was set up outside the door of the room we were in, so both the mother and children would be comfortable. The other parent was offered funds to cover the cost for babysitting while she attended the circle. Food and beverages were provided during both of the talking circles. I also brought art supplies for the Anishinaabe symbol-based reflection activity. At the end of the first talking circle, each of the participants took several items home to complete their projects.

Talking Circles. Sharing circles have been used as part of ceremony within Indigenous cultures and have been employed more and more by Indigenous researchers as a way to conduct research (Lavallée, 2007, p. 72). Hart (2002) stated that "sharing circles are both helping techniques and processes that set the stage for people's ongoing healing, growth, and self-development" (p. 61). Although healing and learning occur in sharing circles (Hart, 2002), there are many factors that influence the degree to which each of these occur. Factors like the size of the group, how long the participants have known each other, where the circle is taking place, etc., all have an impact on the

degree to which people learn and engage in the healing process. For the purpose of this study, I use the term talking circle instead of "sharing circle." One of the protocols of sharing circles is the rule "what is said in the circle stays in the circle." As I audiotaped the talking circles, this rule was not adhered to; therefore, I felt it more appropriate to call the gathering a talking circle.

Although I use the term talking circle, procedurally speaking I followed the same protocol as used in sharing circles with the exception of the aforementioned issue. At the beginning of both circles, ceremonial protocol was followed. We started with a prayer, a smudge, and a song to acknowledge and set a climate of respect for all the women participating in the circle. Prior to sitting down for the first circle all the women were offered tobacco. In giving and receiving tobacco, we made a commitment to honour our agreement and conduct ourselves in a good way.

During the first talking circle, I started each round with a question, following a semi-structured and open-ended conversation guide (see Appendix D for the conversation guide). As shyness was an issue during the beginning of the circle, I asked for a volunteer to start us off. Each person was then given the opportunity to talk with no specific time limits set by the interviewer.

As in any group setting there are potential limitations, such as the issue of "group think," i.e., when members of a group influence other members of the same group to think similarly. By conducting the circles ceremonially, group members were compelled to speak from their hearts, and thereby share their own experiences. I believe this lowered the risk of group think from occurring.

Having shared the talking circle method, I will now direct your attention to an

explanation of Anishinaabe symbol-based reflection.

Anishinaabe symbol-based reflection. Lavallée (2009) described Anishinaabe symbol-based reflection as "an adaptation of photo voice" (p. 30). Photo voice is a research method in which "[p]articipants take pictures that help tell their story regarding a particular concern. The individual's story typically accompanies the pictures to promote an effective, participatory means of sharing expertise," (Lavallée, 2007, p. 75).

What makes Anishinaabe symbol-based reflection different from photo voice is its use of various forms of art including "paintings, drawings, sculptures, crafts, songs, teachings and stories" (Lavallée, 2009, p. 30). I would add drumming to this list as well. Lavallée (2009) adapted photo voice within an Indigenous worldview and approach. She saw the use and the making of symbols to reflect one's story as a sacred and spiritual task. She stated that in making or creating a symbol, the participant's energy is placed within the object created. Symbol-based reflection was another way to capture the meaning that drumming had in the participant's lives. We all have different communication styles and integrating an arts-based approach is a useful way to manage these differences. Participation in art and music-making uses both sides of your brain, which is a more holistic way of creating knowledge and meaning. I argue that in order to do research from a holistic perspective, you have to go beyond the reliance on verbal content alone. In seeking information, this can also be regarded as an unobtrusive method, depending on how it is presented.

Unfortunately in this specific study, time limitations became an issue as I was not able to collect symbols from three of the women. This will be discussed in greater detail under the *Future Considerations* section of this paper.

Journal. I would like to return to a quote I noted earlier by Hart (2007):

> Indigenous methodologies are those ones which permit and enable Indigenous researchers to be who they are while they are actively engaged as participants in the research process. This way of being not only creates new knowledge but transforms whom the researcher is and where she/he is located. (p. 129)

I kept a journal in order to track my own reflections and personal thoughts related to the research process. It was a helpful resource to have in exploring my relationship to the research, and towards developing an understanding of how the research was transformative in my life. Refer to Appendix E for a visual representation of the Indigenous research framework used in this study.

In Chapter 5, I would like to introduce the reader to the participants' *di-bah-ji-mo-wi-nan* (personal stories) as they relate to healing and Dewe-i-gan (Fontaine, 2013). The gathering of these stories took place on August 9th, 2014 and August 16th, 2014.

Chapter Five: The Stories

Gathering the Stories

In this section I have organized the participants' stories in relation to the conversation guide (or interview questions). There were five women in the first talking circle, and two who showed up for the second circle. All of the five women are mothers; one is a third-year university student and the others are professionals who work in the fields of counselling and education. Each woman has been drumming for approximately twenty years.

In this section I have tried to keep the narratives as close as possible to what each women shared, only changing segments that might put their anonymity at risk. Pseudonyms were also used. Some sections were edited to help with the flow of the stories. During the first circle, I started each round with a question from the conversation guide. Shyness was an issue at the beginning of the circle, likely because of the audio recording equipment. To address this issue, I asked for a volunteer to start us off. Ann started us off, then Joan, Susan, Mary and Betty. Each person was given the opportunity to share, with no specific time limits set by the interviewer. Each round in the talking circle started with one of the interview questions, with each woman responding in turn. Not all of the women addressed every question so there may be some topics missing from some participants' sections.

In many ways these stories reflect the Western Door as shown in Absolon's (2010) teachings. She said that "the Western doorway, Niingaabii'ong brings forth teachings of the ancestors, the mind and respect . . . Asserting Indigenous knowledge as a tool for recovery from colonial trauma and all its manifestations is acknowledged in

this doorway" (p. 81). So now let us look at how Dewe-i-gan has or has not been a tool for recovery within the lives of the women participants, starting with Ann. Each story was organized under the following headings. The headings reflect the conversation guide (see Appendix C) that was used during the first talking circle, *Relationship with my Drum, Healing, Connection of Drum and Healing, The Drum as Healer and Future Drummer.*

Ann's Story

Relationship with my Drum. Ann introduced herself by using her spirit name in her Anishinaabe language. She first started drumming about 20 years ago and shared,

> I can't believe it's been 20 years because I still feel really young at the drum. Still fairly new at the drum if that makes sense? I seen [*sic*] people singing and I was really drawn to it, it was a feeling inside me that wanted to know more. I like singing just regular songs but I was told in my teens that I did not have a nice voice. I carried that for a long time.

Her first experience singing with a drum was when she was involved with a theatre group preparing for an International youth gathering. With the encouragement of a friend, and her experience with the theatre group, she eventually started singing at the drum. One of the first songs Ann sang was the Sabe song. She shared,

> It was something that was given to me from my friend when she encouraged me to sing she told me that I had a beautiful voice. She said you have a nice voice; you have a strong voice. Use it, don't let people take that away from you. So it really encouraged me and helps me to have that confidence.

After that experience, Ann met another woman who later became her mentor.

> I seen [*sic*] the women on the drum, Maggie [pseudonym], the women and young girls. I was really drawn to it. I was really incredibly shy so it took until about 1997 when Maggie came to work with us that I finally started talking to her and started singing. Immediately I was singing at the drum. I was still shy doing leads and stuff, but I sat with Maggie and the other women at the drum.

> Mentorship is incredibly important; Maggie talked about that all the time. When somebody new comes to the drum, it is important to make them feel welcome, to encourage them to step out of their shyness, to be comfortable with hearing their voice, to be comfortable with sounding their voice.

In regard to dealing with her shyness, Ann stated,

> Because we were sitting in a circle at the drum, we were looking at one another, we are not seeing all the other people behind us. That helped big-time. But it also had to do a lot with the encouragement, the silent encouragement that I saw from the other women around the drum, the smiles and nods, the thumbs up. They encouraged me to lead and I could see it in the other women's eyes, you can do it. So feeling that, seeing that and knowing that really helped me to step out of my shyness.

Later Ann started singing at a coed drum with two men who were part of her growth. She shared that the men now have different opinions related to women sitting at the big drum. One of the men continues to support women at the big drum and the other does not. She explained,

> The one Elder still continues to encourage and share songs and give songs to us so that we could share with people and with other women. It was a lot of fun because we were kind of competitive in that coed drum group. When practicing we challenged each other with the leads who could sing the loudest or highest. The men would always have a hard time because we could sing higher than them. One of the Elders had no problems with women sitting at the drum because his mom guided him and told him women were the original carriers of the drum. Why should people see something wrong with it? This is something that his mother believed and so this is why he passes on his knowledge.

Ann explained how she dealt with the other teacher's opposing view,

> I've come to the understanding that colonialism has a lot to do with why some men have this view. What gave me the strength to continue was the other women drummers and just that desire within myself to want to learn.

She continued,

> The second Elder helped a lot because his mom was really encouraging too, but it was what he said about his mom, and his mom believed that women should be

> at the drum, that women were part of that drum, they were the original carriers of the drum, we were the original ones to have that drum. And most of all, it was something within me, you know that desire to want to learn, I see it now as growth. I didn't see it before, this growth, wanting to have something better in my life.

Ann emphasized the importance of seeing other women drummers as a source of encouragement, specifically women on the big drum.

> Most of all learning about all the other women drummers that were out there, not just on the hand drums, which is beautiful in itself, but knowing that there are so many other women drum groups, big drum groups out there.

Ann spoke about the role drum and song have within her family and history:

> Drumming is just about everything to me. I have my little ones now and I want to teach them to sing too. I sing to them every morning as I'm driving my little guy to daycare, the Bear song. When I sing as I am driving, it is about having that connection with the next generation . . . but also giving them a connection to our ancestors where the songs originally came from. Having that connection together just the three of us. Yes, drumming is everything to me, it is a big part of me knowing that my two little ones love being around the drum.

She then shared the process she went through before picking up her own drum.

> I have my drum now. It's taken me a long time to get to the point of getting to pick up my own drum. I dreamt years ago of all these different drums. The elder in the dream told me to pick one. So I looked and picked one, it was a pow-wow drum. But I waited and I had a fourth dream about six months ago. I wonder if it's time, and then it was the next night that I dreamt of Susan . . . and she's telling me because I went to her in my dream. They're telling you, it's time, so pick up a drum now. The fourth dream and significance of the dreams and what I have heard from some Elders is that you dream four times, but it is how you feel inside that draws you, what drives you having that fourth dream. The significance for me was getting that validation from the spirit world. It gave meaning to what I was feeling inside. So it's everything to me. I've always wanted to have a drum, I've always wanted to carry a drum. But for myself I felt I needed to go through some things, to honour some things, before I could get to that point. When I first got my first hand drum, I waited and I wanted one so bad. But I waited until an Elder gave me one for my birthday. It

was the best thing that I could ever get in my whole life. Well, now the babies too, but it's everything to me.

The drum brought so much healing for me. As I mentioned before, two women murdered my mom when I was nine. So I lost my connection with a female role model of being mothered and nurtured that was taken away by two women. It really brought a lot of distrust in my life of other women. So drumming with other women has been the best thing to happen for me. It has reconnected me to other women, brought back that connection I lost long ago. Everyone knows me as a drummer, a Woman drummer.

Maggie and Susan and us women, we're making our drumsticks, all together they said we need a manager, I said yes we do, but they were asking me to be the manager. I've been doing this for several years.

Healing. When asked about how the women define healing, Ann responded,

I keep thinking healing is sacred. I heard that said somewhere by an Elder that what we share with others, what comes out of our mouth in the circle and teachings is sacred, and we are to hold those things sacred. It (healing) is a part of me, unique to me, that fits my unique experiences in life.

After two women murdered her mother, Ann lost her connection to and trust in other women, but through the drum found healing. She explained it like this:

For me it's healing to sit with women, to be with women. I've really struggled, since I was a girl, to trust women. Two women murdered my mom when I was nine years old. I know I still struggle with it but I have grown so much to be able to sit with women at a drum or anywhere. I have learned to trust the drum, there's a feeling and it's so hard to describe, a feeling that I get when I sit at the drum. I trust the drum to bring out good things. And that is because it is sacred; it comes from Creator and the grandmothers and grandfathers, the spirit helpers. Whatever happens I always remember that the drum is there and that it is sacred, so it helps with my growth and trust.

Healing for me is to be able to acknowledge things in my past and to know that it's a part of me, but understand that it doesn't need to control me. When my mom was murdered, my dad really struggled and fought really hard to keep us together as a family. There were five children and I was the oldest at nine years. Horrific stuff happens to people and although it is hard to understand why, it happens for a reason.

Through her own healing, she spoke about the importance of remaining open.

> Horrific as it was to be open, to allow myself to be open, that has brought me to where I can pick up the two little ones that I look after and be able to care for them. Being open has allowed me to be able to help others, to be able to help others that maybe have experienced the same thing I've experienced.

Ann highlighted the larger systemic issues that have impacted healing in the lives of Indigenous people:

> What all of us have in common is the impact that colonialism and residential schools have had on us. It's affected us, I haven't been to residential school but my dad has, both my parents had been and my mom's parents and my dad's parents. We have that in common and overcoming all of that is what we have in common.

She continued,

> So if I can do that for other people, as I'm working through my stuff and continue working through my stuff. Healing is to be able to pick up my little ones, to take them and care for them. To give them a really good life, healing is that drum. Sitting there with the women and encouraging one another and sharing. No one person is above another person in all our ceremonies but there's so much more to the drum. Healing are the songs and the teachings, to be sisters, to be family. Healing for me is in knowing that there are all those other women drummers out there across Turtle Island.

Connection of drum and healing. Ann was asked the question, "At what point in your life did you discover that there was a relationship between drumming and healing?"

Ann responded to the question,

> In 1997, I started singing with Maggie and she was able to give me those teachings, share with me about being a woman and about sitting at the drum. It was actually my first time at a women's drum gathering. Gina and Susan came up from the States and it was Betty and Susan who had the vision of the drum gathering. So it was around that time I was beginning to understand what my role was and why I was there. That's the beautiful thing about being at the drum hearing the songs, learning the songs, the teachings that go with the songs, the teachings of the drum itself. It has to do with the hide and the rim, the ways it is

> tied because there are different types of ties that go with each drum. And all of that just brings everything together in a sacred connection. Knowing that, knowing that there are people all over Turtle Island that are doing the same thing, learning the same things just brings all of us closer together even though there's many miles between us.

The Drum as Healer. How has drumming and song promoted healing in your life?

> I was listening to my brothers sing. They started learning from a young age. They were really little guys and they had the best teachers around, or what I consider the best teachers around. They had really good mentorship and good role models. So it's not only hearing [them] sing, but it was like watching them singing and watching them grow. Being able to recognize the leads, they were champion singers, being able to recognize their singing voices. I was able to shut down what was happening, all of the hurt and the sadness that was going on in my life, to be able to hear what was happening at that drum. To be able to listen and hear their voices, hear them singing even way across the arena, that I can have that connection. My nephew, at the age of 6, was listening to my brother sing and he was standing right behind the microphone. You could hear my nephew say "Right on, Uncle John." And that's what it's all about, the younger generation.

Ann added,

> Hearing the grandmothers sing behind us. When I was sitting at the coed drum group with the Elder that supports women's healing at the drum, I heard the grandmothers, even though there were no physical grandmothers present, but I could hear them, the spirits. Having that validation from the spirit world, it was so beautiful and knowing that what we're doing there is sacred . . . and the Sun Dance.

According to Ann, she experiences healing at the drum every time she sits down. She explained it in this way,

> I can't even explain the feeling inside, sitting at the drum; it's every single time. It's having the connection when we start singing the songs, the hair on my arms raise up and I get goose bumps. I get that exciting feeling within me, wanting to share songs, hopefully bring some healing to the people around us.

> It is solidarity, sitting with the other women, and the people around us, they support us. They come and stand around the drum. We have a connection not only with the drum, the drumstick and those medicines but those around the drum. The ones that are standing the furthest from our drum, knowing that they shut down all of that stuff that's going on in their head and being able to listen. The women you drum with are like aunts, Kookums and sisters all rolled up into one. They're like your encouragers, your supporters. They're aunties to the little ones, which is so important. They're mentors to encourage that leadership within each of us. They're like a mom, a Kookum, and they're family. A lot of my growth has happened with my sisters at the drum even though they're not sitting with me in class or with you in the moment I am having a hard time. I know that we are in each other's prayers, that we think about each other, that we have a genuine love for one another.

At this point in the interview I added a question related to their experiences of Group versus individual drumming. This came after the round of questions was complete**.**

Ann responded:

> The only time I sing alone is when I'm teaching. I teach at school. And I'm going back for my third year, that's pretty much it, or when I'm asked to sing a song. . . . and when I sing for the little ones. It's all about the little ones, teaching them the traditions helping them know they have an identity and not the stereotypes that people want to believe.

Future Drummer.

> I have a pleasant little vision of myself as an old Kookum riding on a motorcycle. A big drum strapped to the back, in my ribbon leather pants, on the motorcycle that my nieces and nephews are all going to buy me, going all over to sing with other women. I'll always be singing and drumming.

Additional comments.

> I was thinking of a book that I just found out about, a book from the US. It's about women drummers and it was done by a couple of doctors, so I ordered it. I have heard it said by many women drummers that we've always been part of that drum, that half that drum is woman and half is man. That it is always . . . that it's inside of us. We have dreams about carrying drums, sitting at drums;

> some of us are gifted at making songs. You know, those come from Creator, and women should be encouraged to sing. Women should be encouraged to honour those dreams and visions.

Second talking circle and presentation of symbol. Ann brought in two symbols, which represent her relationship with her drum. One symbol was a turtle and the other a drumming skirt. The turtle she made during a previous gathering referred to as the Grandmother (Kookum) Project and the skirt was given to her as a gift. Ann started our second talking circle by sharing her story related to the making of her turtle symbol. The intent of the Kookum project was to share traditional teachings with the younger generation of women from the inner city. Ann shared,

> I picked up so much from there; it was really something that I needed to do and to be with. When I knew that I was getting a baby girl that was something that I needed to do as a woman drummer, to be able to go and connect with the grandmothers, grandmothers that would be able to share those really strong teachings, who I see as really good role models. This was part of that whole project, for us to come and make this (turtle). It took us a little longer than they had planned for but . . .

Ann continued by sharing some of the symbolism of the turtle and related it to her immediate and extended family.

> But it also symbolizes being a woman drummer and having those teachings of the turtle, those different doorways in the turtle teachings, each section on the turtle's back has different meanings. It has to do with the 13 moons and the 28 little ones, which signifies the 28 days. I'll have to think more about them. So I'm going to move on to the one that was made for me.

Figure 2: Ann's Anishinaabe Symbol: Turtle

Ann's second symbol was a skirt, which she described in this way:

> It's such a beautiful skirt, something that I can't do. And it has the colours that are just so beautiful, it has the calico print which is originally how women made our skirts, with the calico print. And with the ribbons, she [her friend] knows that I'm bear clan so she put a bear on it with the two bear paws.

She then makes reference to the drum and the many associated teachings.

> It's so beautiful, with the ribbons going around it just reminds me of how we dress our big drums, when we put the skirt on it . . . we have a flared skirt on our drum. It's gathered and it flares.
>
> And then other ones will be tight around the drum so each person will address their drum differently based on how it comes to them.
> So this skirt also reminds me of that but it also reminds me of that sisterhood and how it was given to me. You know how we share our gifts with one another and this is one of her gifts, she has many, many gifts. She is very gifted. Very beautiful woman.
>
> And also how we come to know one another this skirt was just right for me. She didn't get no measurements or nothing [*sic*], but she knew it was just the right length and fits right around the waist. It's roomy around the hips so I can sit, stand, or kneel or whatever so it reminds me [of] that symbolism of how we get to know one another at the drum. How we are like family. All the women that I sit with, I would trust with my little ones.
>
> And it also reminds me that the drum has two sides: it has a side for the female and it has a side for the male; and that everything has teachings. There is still a lot that I need to learn. There's still much more teachings [*sic*] in this skirt that was made for me. Why the colours? Why the ribbons? Why the prints? And what are the bear claws going to mean? It's more than just the clan, there's a

story in it. When a person has a traditional outfit made, it will tell his/her story and he needs to know that story to be able to share it with people.

Figure 3: Ann's Anishinaabe Symbol: Traditional Skirt

She explained that her son was having an outfit made.

> We'll do the designing first, then he will take over when he gets older. This is what I see. And this is part of what it means for me to be able to sit at the drum and sing those songs. There's so much to know, to learn in each of the songs we sing, where they come from, who made the song, the different drumbeats that go with the song, like the type of dances. That's all I can think of right now.

I met with Ann one last time in order to audiotape a song that she wanted to share. It was actually the first song she learned, the Sabe Song.

Joan's Story

Relationship with my Drum. Joan began by sharing how her relationship with the drum started.

> I first started drumming at the big drum around the age of 14. I got to do a project at the Native Women's Transition Centre when they built this new round building for ceremonies and stuff. Valerie at the Centre had a big drum and sat us all down at it. She mistakenly thought I could drum, she just assumed. She put a hand drum in my hand and wanted me to sing to help these people that lost someone. She put the drum in my hand and said here, you're a singer. I stood there and didn't know what to say and I sang that Cherokee morning song. I didn't know if it was right but I kept doing it. At the end of it, I ran into another room. I just kind of threw up because I was so nervous but the family was having

such a hard time.

Similar to the experiences of the other women participants, Joan also received encouragement from other women.

> And then Valerie showed us the Bear Song on the big drum. She taped it and it was really terrible, when I think about it now, it did not sound anything like the bear song. But she was so patient, I kept coming back and she kept trying this over and over, that was really good. It seemed natural for me to sit at the drum I didn't have anyone telling me there was anything wrong with it until later and by then I didn't believe them at all.

She continued,

> The people that I drum with, they are family. It's more than just the drum; it's easier to sing on a hand drum by yourself, because it's you and you can control the tone and how you are singing but when you sing around a big drum you have to learn to sing together, you have to learn how to drum together, you have to learn how to watch each other, listen to each other and that goes a long way to being kind, being respectful towards one another and just learning to work together a little better.
>
> The drum is a heartbeat and a circle for a reason. A heartbeat creates life; around the drum, that's what you're doing, you're creating a life energy, that's why people are naturally drawn to it; that's why someone who never grew up in an Indigenous home but has Indigenous blood in them is drawn to the drum even if they don't know why. It's a circle because no one is above or below another, plant life, animal life, spirit and people. Because you can't sit around the drum and be angry at the other person, it's really hard, it's really hard to sit at a drum and be angry at the person across from you then the song doesn't sound so good. But I think that is kind of a metaphor for life in general. My kids grew up to drum. They had a little rattle and drum in their hands before they had their little toys.

Healing. Joan responded to the question on healing in this way:

> In our language we use minobimaadiziwin, meaning the good life, but it's more than that if you break up the word. It's living a good life, not just physically but mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. It's not just people; it's that whole relationship because there is the plant life, animals, there is us, there is the water, there are the medicines and everything goes through a process.

> Healing is not a noun it is a verb which is why I say "process." We don't go through life free from imbalance because those imbalances teach us something or they're meant to teach us something. After we've learned whatever that "something" is, we can move on to the next imbalance and learn about the next "something." An over simplified version would be someone who's never been to school goes to school and learns what it's like to be a student, they struggle and cope and at the end they graduate. They've come through those imbalances with new skills and new teachings, on to the next imbalance by finding a job and working in a different environment than school. If it doesn't go through that process in a good way that's where that sickness comes in and results in dis-ease, hurt and all that stuff come in.

Connection of Drum and Healing. Joan was asked, "At what point in your life did you discover that there was a relationship between drumming and healing?" She responded:

> I used to help an Elder who did darkroom ceremonies and always wanted me to drum for him. I did it a few times then realized there is a reason why he's asked me to do this. He said "I like it because they come in when you call them." Healing starts spiritually from our way, the spirit comes in to help so when we're in those darkroom ceremonies, we're singing. Not for "support" for the actual healing; if everything is connected and everything has a spirit or an energy vibration, then unhealthiness, sickness, dis-ease, they all have one as well and before you can heal the physical part or whatever it is that needs rebalancing, you need to ask that spirit to leave first. If the spirit doesn't leave, then whatever is going on will keep going on or keep growing. It isn't support; it's the actual work.

Joan then realized she could transfer what she learned in the dark room ceremonies to her work with women on the big drum. She explained:

> I thought if that could happen here, maybe I can take it and put it there. Take it to big drum with the women and find that place inside me, that I find when I do the dark room ceremony, that space between this world and spirit world, where that connection is stronger and the energy vibration is higher—when you're standing between two worlds, or maybe singing between two worlds is a better way to put it. When I'm drumming and find that place inside and pull it out. It's just an energy connection and when you have a few women around the drum sounding it

> and singing, it's like meditating but meditation on steroids when it's good. When you're singing and drumming and focussing solely on what you're creating with each other, you're not just connecting with yourself or with the other women—you're connecting with the energy around you. The animal world from the skin of the drum, the plant world with the ring and the smudge, spirit when you sing those songs and sound a drum that's been blessed. So I started noticing a difference not just in me but also in the song. We have a really good time, it's cathartic. I could leave whatever I needed there.

Here she explained the difference between cathartic release and getting distance from a troubling issue: "Cathartic is releasing and is different than getting distance. One is a geographical cure and one is letting go." She continued by sharing how, over time, the relationship to her drum deepened.

> I started to be able to talk to the drum while I was singing. I talk with the spirit of the drum either in my mind or my heart. I might introduce myself, or give thanks, or release, or ask to be shown something, or ask a question. Sometimes you get answers right there during the song. I don't know if I would call it "prayer." We are told that we just ask; more of a conversation with someone older and wiser than you. My mind and my heart could talk to her and just say whatever I needed into her because she can take it, take care of it much better than I can, whatever needed settling or resolving.
>
> In the community I noticed that the drum is just healing, just pure healing when people and families kept asking to come out and sing when they lost someone, when someone had gone missing, when they found another sister, another brother, they would ask for us to come and sing. At first I thought it was because they wanted comfort or support but it was because there had been a disruption and you need a way through it.
>
> By raising the vibration of your own spirit, your own energy, [it] reminds [you that] you are a spiritual being having a human experience. Like a knot on a dream catcher, in the cute little story, it helps you over the obstacles, even if that obstacle is yourself.
>
> The drum is a heartbeat; not a metaphorical heartbeat, not representing a heartbeat, it's a heartbeat. And healing can't happen if you don't find your way

> through it. You can stay stuck in that disruption, you can stay stuck in that experience but when you come through it, you are better able to help other people. You're better able to help yourself because you know that experience.

The Drum as Healer. Joan highlighted the Sun Dance Ceremony as being a healing experience. "It's the songs, the whole experience, sounds, colours, the rattle, the drums, and in the trees." She continued by focussing on the more practical aspects of drumming and song.

> I had a recent experience; it's really bad because when I hear the drum I say "okay, that's off," I'll say "okay, that stick is off," or "they came in too late," or "that was a good lead," "oh no they are doing the hook." You learn and progress as you work together and try things out on your own and learn songs and how to sing together. As you progress, you grow in your skills and things you never noticed before, you notice now. When you are singing you are honouring that song, where it came from, what it's for, who it was given to and the intention of it. When you get that you understand more about that road from your head to your heart and how it works. You can think about "technique" for lack of a better word; at the same time, you're feeling something. It's the collective energy that makes the difference. I'm really used to that, I guess. I can feel good if it's a good song.

Joan then shared what it was like for her to attend a ceremony in which they used the Little Boy Water Drum. She also spoke about being witness to teachings shared by other Nations.

> I went to a ceremony and they do things differently; they have a little water drum and they drum really fast. At one point something inside just went "pop." Something released, like that comment above about the road from your head to your heart, once you've made it you can go back and forth and connect them but a different ceremony or a different drum can bring you new or different teachings and healing. Burst out, all the ceremony we do, all the experiences we do, people talk about love, one nation one people, we fight over our ceremonies, we fight over what's wrong, who should do this, who has a right to do that.
>
> I went to a peyote ceremony and some people would not be impressed that I went. The one Kookum we keep talking about, Valerie, said I could do it just to experience it, to know what it is like. I said okay, I can do that. And I went once;

> it was amazing. I was really scared, but I was scared what the reaction of people I knew [would be]. At the ceremony they do a lot of talking about healing, there's a lot of talking about love. [They] said "what does it mean when people are afraid of each other's ceremonies?" And people put that fear inside of those people instead of the love. [They] said the only way we're getting that unity . . . you don't have to come here and have those experiences and be part of this all the time, even once—come twice so you know what it's like, to have that respect for it; it'll go a long way to helping each other.

After spending two weeks with a community, Joan noticed the way in which community members honoured one another and had this to say,

> After a person speaks on behalf of their people, or for women or men, an elder will stand up and will sing to honour that person, saying thank you, and that's a lot of respect. It is something we tried here.

She explained that there did not seem to be the same respect here, where she is from.

> In this ceremony, it was for a woman who needed healing from cancer, so when you are drumming it is not just about that cancer, it's all that stuff. When you heal this way you heal Spiritually; it is whole person experience.

Joan then shared some drum teachings with us,

> It helps you even when it's just you singing. The spirit that comes in, you're calling them. The animal gave itself [for] the hide, the tree that gave itself for the ring. So you're really connected and grounded, and it is just automatic and sacred. And sitting around it you become part of sacredness and that's healing.

Here she identified purpose as a consideration when talking about healing and drumming.

> It is different practicing; it's different from when we're singing for someone. The drum travels, the drum takes us when we are all together with women. Depending on where that drum is taking us, it's a little bit different. It is not we taking the drum; it is the drum taking us there. I need to go here and it's for the people. So when we are just practicing and it's just us, it's great: you are laughing, you're crying a bit and you're venting and you're talking and you're connecting with yourself, connecting with the drum, connecting with women. When we're up there and we're singing for people for a reason, we've been asked to go, it's like a heartbeat and we are all together. We're part of that, that

heartbeat, that energy is a little circle around us and people gravitate towards us. Sometimes to listen to and it feels really good but it is just like you've created a person out of something that's not people, that physical, it's energy.

Group versus Individual Drumming.

Usually I drum solo for a specific purpose, or I am doing a ceremony for myself. I'll sing for someone, or someone passes you tobacco [and] asks you to do an opening song, a closing song, or a pipe song, etc. But there has been a time when my steering wheel has turned into a drum on a long road trip and I let out a good one on the road and I kind of let it fly. That gives me a sense of peace.

Future Drummer.

It's a given as long as you have a voice. I had a dream where they made me choose the drums. I don't know what happened but I will always be drumming; I'll always be sitting at someone's big drum and have a hand drum. I let the drum lead. If I make plans and I say I'm going to do this, I see myself here or myself there, I picture someone up there laughing at me and pointing at me, so I just lay the drum aside. As long as I have a voice, I'll be singing and drumming as a way to connect myself, my family, my people, to each other and to spirit.

Susan's Story

Relationship with my Drum. Susan is the eldest woman of the group; she is a parent and has worked in the helping profession for many years as a nurse and counsellor. She started by sharing the role drumming and song has played in her life to mark important events and to promote healing.

I'm not sure when I first started drumming. Drumming is very important in my life in terms of healing; learning all the songs, when I go to sweat lodges learning all those things and healing.

Drumming is integral for representing the start of something like the school year. As a counselor it was important at the end of the year to let go of painful stories I may have heard from the students, to rebalance myself. As a caregiver and one that assists others with healing, this is important for self-care.
Like when you have a warrior song for somebody that's going through some difficulties, or even celebrating a certain event that is meaningful like when I graduated from social work. I had my cousin's son sing an honour song just

> before I did my presentation. That was very nice. There are songs for certain occasions. A warrior song recognizes a person accomplishing a difficult thing. The honour song done at the presentation of my thesis made me feel very proud and steadied me as I did it.

She continued,

> The other time drumming was really important to me was when my son's dad was told he was terminal with cancer. My dad had died six months before that; I thought . . . "oh, how am I going to get through this? I don't know how I'm going to survive without my dad, and yet I have to tell my son that he's going to make it through losing his dad." I went to a lot of drumming and ceremonies to get through things like that. When my son's dad was terminal, drumming and singing was a way that I prayed and supported my son. My son and I are strongly spiritually connected.
>
> For me, I really believe that women should be drumming. My elders told me that I am part of the spiders' clan, which is an ancient women's clan. So who's the first heartbeat that a baby hears? Its mothers. Who does the baby's heart meet first? Its mothers. So I just think the drum is like a heartbeat. So I say yeah, it is good to have women drumming. I have a sister in the US and she's widowed now. Her family, her husband and her, are very strong drummers. It's a wonderful bonding thing to have.

Healing. When asked what healing meant to her, Susan replied in this way:

> I guess it's opening up, becoming aware. I know a lot of people talk about healing being like a butterfly when you're a caterpillar and you are in that cocoon. Maybe that's what I'm saying for myself: that's what I was like when I was younger. I had no idea of how my life was going to go. And I am very aware now at my age to know it could've gone in a really bad way but I was very fortunate to be connected to people that encouraged me to keep on going.

Susan believed that you cannot heal in isolation; you need support from other people.

> Yes, healing is becoming aware of my process of development from child-youth-young adult-adult and to Elder. That's what I say to other people: to surround yourself with people that encourage you to keep on going. You cannot heal alone. I do need others for support, to give me ideas about how to change.

Here she spoke about the importance of mentors,

> Having a mentor is important. Although I can be oppositional if someone tells me I can't do it, I will show him or her I can do it and do it well. I had my paternal grandparents and my aunties when I went to college and I wanted to quit school. They said keep on going; you'll never know when you'll have to take care of yourself. I feel it strange now I feel like an old lady now. They were in very traditional marriages and didn't work outside the home and yet they were cheering me on to go to college to have this career. The blessings to have my grandparents, especially my grandmother—she was like 95 pounds soaking wet and had really bad rheumatoid arthritis, and was housebound, but she had a powerful spirit, a powerful spirit and powerful love that she gave to me, to push me forward to keep doing what I was doing.

In addition to her social supports, Susan recognized that she also had a role to play in her development. Here she shared about some of the hardships associated with that process.

> I guess I have been fortunate enough to have the ears to hear what other people would say to me. At the same time I struggled with confidence and was told I was stupid, told I was not university material. I did my nursing as a registered nurse, got my Bachelor Social Work, then completed my Master of Social Work. I'm not saying that education healed me but it opened me up to processes, doing things, opening me up to my own culture. I didn't get my treaty status until I was in my 30s because of my mom not having her status, and all of a sudden there's this whole identity thing. So I guess drumming started when I was in university, doing my BSW. I was scared at first to look at my traditional ways because I felt a lot of shame at first, but I grew into it. I heard that my great grandmother had [a] medicine bundle and was told she hid it somewhere. I actually had a vision that she hid it under a rock somewhere. The story was that she thought other people would be foolish with it. I think she was protecting it. So I know I have it in my background and I know where I'm supposed to be working with women.

Connection of Drum and Healing. When asked "At what point in your life did you discover that there was a relationship between drumming and healing?" Susan replied, "I think I mentioned one earlier, that was helping in getting me through my son's father's illness."

The Drum as Healer. Here Susan spoke about metaphysical happenings during her participation in ceremonies and during a near death experience. She also related that one must be "open" in order to experience the benefits of healing.

> When I feel, hear and see things in the lodge, to me that is healing. I remember it being too hot one time, lying down on the ground and I actually could feel people dancing in their moccasins. About a year and a half ago I just about died at home. I know I just about died because a doctor had given me this medicine and it was a horrific thing. I could see women, everybody was dressed in their traditional regalia, there was dancing around me, it was a comforting experience, kind of scary because I wasn't ready to go. Ended up staying so I'm still here, I have had experiences like that.
>
> Drumming and singing does help create visions. Sometimes visions come in dreams as well. Once an Elder asked me if I saw things and I said "yes, doesn't everybody?" I just always think that the drumming heartbeat, it's got to be healing, how can you not hear your heartbeat? I guess some people don't want to recognize it. Healing can occur if one is open to it. It's funny to see somebody disconnected. I had a boyfriend once who decided he wanted to experience things with me, so we went to the sweat lodge and he sat on the edge of the lodge. He was terrified, just went flying out the lodge, he was really scared. My now ex-husband was scared of ceremonies and stuff like that but gradually would come with me to the lodge, went through the whole ceremony and got a name. So when people are ready I guess they do it.

Healing can occur in many different ways. Here, Susan spoke about her family and the insights gained through this experience.

> I think one of the most important times for me was singing with my cousin at the residential school survivors' gathering. To sing for them and with my cousin, who is a residential school survivor, it was good. It was good because it wasn't thinking about people as victims, it was thinking of them as survivors. To think about them as being warriors, thinking about them as being totally amazing. When I look at someone like my mother and her siblings and know that they were able to keep their language going no matter what happened to them.
>
> It was the energy of the drum in recognition of the residential survivors in a good way. Unfortunately with her suffering the only way I heard more stories was when she was drinking, that's when she could talk about herself, her

> suffering. As years went on and people became more open about their experiences as survivors, I kind of understood. Just kind of having pride, you are honourable people, you are honourable, you were honourable children, and you were taken from your mothers and your fathers. I just think it was a great honour to do that.

Sharing her knowledge with the younger ones also has been very meaningful for Susan.

> My other experience was when I went to some of the schools; I made a little video of pow-wow dancing and went to the elementary schools to teach little children pow-wow dancing. It was so much fun and what was nice about it is that the teachers came back to us and said "I didn't even know that kid knew how to pow-wow dance, or that that kid was First Nations or that kid was Métis". There is lots of healing to drumming and going to pow-wow gatherings.

Group Versus Individual Drumming.

> I only do that sometimes; I'll just listen to a CD. Just wanting to feel connected. When I [would] listen to drum music on a CD, I would use it as a way of calming myself, or meditation.

Future Drummer. Susan's last comment shared during our first talking circle was, "I don't think you should stop drumming and singing songs, you have a voice"

Second Talking Circle: Anishinaabe Symbol-Based Reflection Activity. For our second talking circle, Susan began by sharing her spirit name and informing us that she was part of the spider clan, an ancient woman's clan. For her symbol, she wrote a personal story on the meaning of the drum, which she shared with Ann and me.

Susan's Drum Story

> Drumming is a heartbeat; it is strong. The first heartbeat your child hears is yours, if you are fortunate enough to carry a child; the mother's heartbeat is strong, strong enough to carry a child life within her. A baby's heartbeat is very different; it beats very rapidly. Why? I am not sure but it is growing quickly so maybe that is why. Drumming brings images to my mind, attending a Pow Wow, watching the little ones dance for the first time, their body's [*sic*] dance so naturally to the music. It brings images of the sweat lodge ceremonies, the heat, the songs, the drumming and the prayers offered there. I have visions of

> performances and feel much pride for the drummers. There are a variety of drums. I have been honoured to see many, there was a large floor drum with many people drumming and singing together. I have seen the little water drum in a ceremony, it was very special. The hand drum sometimes with a lone singer. I have seen an Inuit drum or a Quiluet, they are very wide and thin and are played very differently. My most amazing experience was to be at a spring ceremony where everyone brought his or her bundles. And they laid them out; we could see drums made for the little people, for the little tiny things right up to the large host drum who was leading the ceremony that day. Every drum is beautiful, every artist is amazing, women or men, are amazing instruments of healing for our families and communities.

In her writing, Susan created visual images that reflect her experiences attending various ceremonies in which the drum and song were central. She used the words "pride" and "honoured" as she shared her feelings related to these experiences.

Mary's Story

Relationship with my Drum. Mary introduced herself by her spirit name and shared that she started drumming when she was a teenager in 1986. She had been adopted out to the US, and returned back to Canada in 1986, where she was put into foster care. Mary attended Ross Brook House where she was first exposed to native ceremony, teachings and the sound of the traditional drum.

She shared "I remember when I heard them (a drum group playing at the school). I almost started crying. Like my God, it's so beautiful". Mary continued with her story:

> In 1994 I was invited to sing with a men's group, but months later told I shouldn't be sitting with the men. This is when I started my first women's group and we were taken to an elder who is still well known and doesn't believe in women singers but he conducted a ceremony for us. During the ceremony the spirit told us we were going to break up within two years but there's one here that will carry on, one of you guys will carry on. She will be hurt many times and want to give up. But this group will fail, you women will have kids, go to school, get jobs. So the group will break up but one of you will still sing and carry on. Right away I thought he was talking about me. Like I kind of knew.

She spoke to the experience of lateral violence and shared,

> There were other times when I've been publicly humiliated and wanted to quit. To me that drum is like healing. So I don't think I ever would. I think it helps a lot of women to be stronger and to get their voices out. It is part of our healing; it is part of our children's healing, part of the community healing. Whenever some women come and she's [*sic*] feeling discouraged, I say to them, what feels right to you inside your heart? Do you feel it's a good thing? Don't listen to what everybody else says. If the Creator gave us this drum and it was given to us first, don't listen to those people that discourage you. I tell them women singers are going to be hurt lots, I'm just going to warn you, but in the end you'll have a lot of joyful times; you'll be honoured and it will come full circle. There will be bad times and then there will be really good highs. Drums are a circle; just keep on drumming, keep on carrying on with it.

Healing.

> I think healing for me is letting go of my past; I still struggle with it every day. That's really hard; it is a really touchy subject because I think I'll struggle with it till the day I die. Just letting my demons go, that's what healing is to me. I think the drum helps me and everybody else that are on their healing journey. I think right now it's really hard for a lot of us women to have that strength that we need to have that drum, to hold onto it. It gives us life, in our spirit, to heal—that is what healing is.

Connection of Drum and Healing. Here Mary referred to her "a-ha" moment as it related to drumming and healing:

> I always knew that drumming came along with healing, but the big "a-ha" moment was when I was [at] a treatment centre; I struggle with alcohol and drug addiction. I'm not going to lie and say to people that I am a sober person, but I know that the drum helps. I guess it was last year at a treatment centre while I was at a sweat, I learned that I was a little people, windigo. I think a lot of us women who do drum, we end up being windigokan. It's that backwards spirit, was not going to listen to anybody or was just going to do what we want (laughs). We just don't care, or we do care but we don't. We'll do what we want to do because we know it feels right. So I found out there I was a windigo.

Mary explained,

The next sweat we had there was a little boy that came to the sweat; he was my son who passed on. I struggled with guilt and everything, I still do. I always wonder or argue with myself, "why am I still drumming?" Like when I'm drinking, I tell myself I should be totally sober and I shouldn't be doing this. I should be sober on the drum. I know my sisters here have always encouraged me and continue to let me sing with them. Because they know what has happened and they told me it is a part of healing and you need that.

At the sweat they acknowledged my son's name and said that's why you carry that drum. The Creator gave that to you as a gift. I'm supposed to put my son's symbols on my drum and put them on the skirt. They told me Creator gave that to you as a gift to help with your healing. I always struggled and thought to myself "why?" Now I know that the Creator gave me that special gift to drum, to be a singer, to help me through my healing process. That's the number one, why I have such a deep connection with the drum and singing.

The Drum as Healer.

Every time I am on the drum I feel healing. Sitting around the drum, sharing our voices. We are usually giggling and laughing or talking about how hard our day was, bonding and encouraging. With your drum sisters you can tell them anything that's going on, they go "yeah, me too." We share our stories, good bonding, and good to get up and bring your children.

Group versus Individual Drumming.

I rarely drum by myself; usually it's for the group. If I'm practicing at home, I've been given the gift to make songs, that's mostly when I'll take out the hand drum and sing, I have to know if the song will go with the beat that I'm using . . . that's the only time. In the past I have sung alone for events or gigs. Lately I choose not to, so only when I'm making songs or when I'm at a sweat or . . . laughter.

Future Drummer.

Well it's pretty hard to say, because there's times I work with a drum and there's times I want to be by myself, to take a step back; depends on what is happening in my life, the way I feel. I know sometimes I get overwhelmed and sometimes you just have to say no and take time to yourself. . . . It depends on what's happening, depends on where I am in my life, what I believe is right at that time because in a lifetime I go through a lot of changes. And yes, I would like to see myself continue singing forever. I'll probably get more

> discouragement on the way as I was shown last year, but it just makes me stronger. I cannot let other people influence my decision . . . what I want to do with my life. And there's just too much love and stuff that goes along with drumming that I'm never going to let it go.

Additional comments. Mary ended by offering words of encouragement to other women who are being called to the drum.

> I just want to encourage other women. If they feel they need to drum, don't be scared—do it and do what you feel is right, don't listen to people who have discouraged you or are discouraging, because there are a lot of people that believe in it.

ékosáni to Mary, now let's turn to Betty's story.

Betty's Story

Relationship with my Drum. Betty introduced herself with her spirit name and, like the other group members, started drumming about 20 years ago under the mentorship of Maggie. She shared,

> I started drumming about 20 years ago with Maggie. We used to go there and drum with her in the basement; I just loved it. I was only 19 or 20 at the time, just learning my culture because I was adopted and didn't know anything about being brown-skinned, so it was great to be brown. I loved it. Maggie was awesome. We hung out and would do everything together; was like a family, you have drum practices, and you'd also go out and do things with each other.

Betty took an extended break from the drum until about five years ago when she did an opening for Buffy Sainte-Marie's art show. After the show, Betty started to sing and drum again with another group of women. She too was discouraged from drumming at the big drum by a respected male elder, and was conflicted on what to do. Betty continued,

> I talked to my elder from work and talked to a couple of other elders that I totally respect. I was told that women are half the drum and man are half. And that women have been sitting and singing at the big drum for a long time.

People are going to say that to you. Like Joan said to me, do what feels good to you, it's not for other people. If other people are going to say that to you . . . they shouldn't be saying things like that.

Healing.

Healing is everything that we do . . . our drumming, our singing our praying. When we are singing, our ceremonies, our Sun Dance, our shake tents, all the ceremonies that help me every day and my daughter. I don't want her to see or go down the path that I went down, going to drugs and alcohol. I don't want her to see that. I'll do everything I can so that she doesn't go down that road, so she doesn't feel that pain. So she doesn't choose alcohol and drugs but chooses our traditional ways where there is so much love and caring. I always try to encourage, anyway that's what our ceremonies and teachings are for. For us to be together as one, to be one heartbeat, all our people that are going down a different path to bring them back, holding them up, care for them, walk with them. I think there is so much love; our ceremonies can help all of us.

Connection of Drum and Healing.

I guess my "a-ha" moment was when we went down to Alabama. That was about four years ago. It was at a women's drum gathering; there were a lot of drums and a lot of women. I thought to myself "wow, we can change the world!" It was just beautiful to see, and all the different songs and every different kind of songs. There was me from up north, most of the people were from the States, it was just beautiful, the power of song and healing songs and healing . . . the beauty of it was amazing.

The Drum as Healer.

To me, I thought about the Sun Dance, when you hear the drum and that's like your focus for the four days, and the songs. . . . and then hearing those prayers and everything that go along with the Sun Dance, that's what I totally think of right away.

Betty described singing with other women in this way:

It is about healing, about sharing, when you need advice or you find out someone else is going to a sweat, or other ceremony. You have that kind of connection, you can always call them even if you are not sitting at the drum, you can always call them up on the phone, I need somebody to talk to, and you can go visit if you need help**.**

Future Drummer. Betty ended by sharing, “I will always be singing and drumming.”

Chapter Six: Meaning Making

Building Understanding Through my Conversation With Dewe-i-gan

In discussing Indigenous ontology and epistemology, Wilson (2008) explained it like this,

> There may be multiples [*sic*] realities. The difference is that, rather than the truth being something that is "out there" or external, reality is in the relationship that one has with the truth. . . . Thus an object or a thing is as important as one's relationship to it . . . reality is not an object but a process of relationships, and an Indigenous ontology is actually the equivalent of an Indigenous epistemology. (p.73)

On exploring drumming and song and its relationship to healing, the women in this study discussed these multiple realities and their relationship to these realities. Their stories are based on relationships: relationships with each other, with the Drum, with the ancestors, with the community, with the land and animals, and with the larger world. In his study, Wilson (2008) found several of the people interviewed believed that "this relational way of being was at the heart of what it means to be Indigenous" (p. 80). Kenny (2002a) utilized the story method in her research entitled "North American Indian, Métis and Inuit women speak about culture, education and work." So I, too, have decided the best way to share the outcome of this study is through relating and dialoguing with the stories I have been told.

In a course titled, Pathways to Indigenous Wisdom, Dr. Jerry Fontaine spoke many times in class about the importance of stories and how these stories teach us about Indigenous epistemology and ontology.

> The ah-di-so-kah-nahg (sacred and spiritual stories), do-bah-ji-mo-wi-nan reminiscences, and stories of personal experience and ah-way-chi-gay-wi-nan (moral stories) are used to teach or share our gah-i-zhi-way-bahg (oral history)

> and ah-zhi-di-bah-ji-mo-wi-nan (traditions). (Fontaine, personal communication, 2014)

Wilson (2008) explained the first level of story like this: "these stories are sacred and contain the history of our people. . . . only those trained, tested, and given permission to do so are allowed to tell these stories, which may never vary in how they are told" (p. 98). The second level of story reflects Indigenous legends which are shaped and shared in relation to the storyteller; although, the underlying message of these stories remain the same (Wilson, 2008, p. 98). The last level of stories reflect those stories related to our own lived experiences like the personal stories of the women's understanding of the relationship between drumming and healing. Throughout this paper I have shared do-bah-ji-mo-wi-nan, stories of personal experiences, and those second level stories related to Indigenous legends surrounding the drum as a way to highlight the value of the feminine within an Indigenous worldview. I would now like to call upon the story of this study with the help of the Spirit of the Drum and the women's do-bah-ji-mo-wi-nan.

As I have discussed in previous chapters, there are many different types of drums; their purpose may differ, as may the name that each drum carries. This variation depends on the drum's relationship to its carrier. For the purpose of this analysis I will call upon the Spirit of the Drum from which this research idea originated, and continue to use the name Dewe-i-gan in referring to her. My intent is to develop a deeper relationship with Dewe-i-gan through an authentic portrayal of the participant's stories, the stories shared from other academics and through my own story. Rather than use the western concepts of validity and reliability, Wilson (2008) used the terms "authentic" and "relational" which are reflective of an Indigenous worldview (p. 101).

Wilson continued, "[. . .] by that I mean the research must accurately reflect and build upon the relationships between the ideas and the participants" (p. 101). Through member checks, self-reflexivity, and framing this study within an Indigenous framework, I believe I am striving towards authentic and relational accountability within the study. Similar to Wilson (2008), I will create a story within stories as my way toward creating the collective story. Wilson (2008) refers to this process as cumulative analysis, a process of developing meaning from the stories, but not necessarily in a linear fashion. My desire and hope is to do this with humility and respect for all the voices involved.

My Conversation With Dewe-i-gan

Me: I thank you and am honoured that you, Dewe-i-gan, are here and are so willing to share your knowledge with us. I share with you the personal stories of the women drummers in this study and how they view their healing in relation to you. By directly speaking to you it may make this meaning-making process easier. You are the sole reason why we came together. I also want to build my relationship with you and develop my understanding and knowledge of your teachings as they relate to the concept of healing.

Dewe-i-gan: Well I am glad to be a part of this conversation. As you know, "respect, reciprocity, and responsibility are key features of any healthy relationship and must be included in an Indigenous methodology" (Wilson, 2008, p. 77), and we can talk about these concepts as we go along.

Me: Sounds good. So let's begin. In the personal stories shared, the women spoke about how they were drawn to you, and through this process eventually developed their

own voice. I guess my first question pertains to the possible reasons why so many people are drawn to you. Here are a couple of statements that were shared during our talking circle:

> I seen [*sic*] the women on the drum, Maggie [pseudonym], the women and young girls. I was really drawn to it. (Ann)
>
> I remember when I heard them (a drum group . . .) I almost started crying. Like my God, it's so beautiful. (Mary)

Dewe-i-gan: My friend *bawdwaywidun banaise* (Eddie Benton-Banai) put it well when he shared that,

> The drum . . . reminds us of who we are as Anishinaabe. Even if you did not grow up learning about the culture and you were totally disconnected through adoption or what have you, when you first hear the drum the blood memory of who you are comes back, the drum reminds you of this. (Torrie, 2004).

Me: Yes that is interesting because the women shared this idea of blood memory. One woman was adopted and through drumming, she was able to reconnect with her identity as an Aboriginal woman. She shared "I was adopted and didn't know anything about being brown-skinned, so it was great to be brown". Joan puts it this way . . .

> A heartbeat creates life, around the drum, that's what you're doing, you're creating a life energy, that's why people are naturally drawn to it; that's why someone who never grew up in an Indigenous home but has Indigenous blood in them is drawn to the drum even if they don't know why.

So it sounds like the women are also talking about blood memory. I remember the first time I heard the drum and how overwhelming the feeling was at the time. I too felt like crying. Baskin (2006) quoted another scholar as saying "memory comes before knowledge" and continued by saying "for me, this magical, mysterious, and completely sensible phrase captures the connections inherent in Aboriginal worldviews" (p. 1).

Dewe-i-gan: Yes, completely sensible. That is the interesting thing about memory. There are many different forms of memory.

Me: Yes, I believe Shirley Turcotte (personal communication, April, 2010) has spoken about memory, in that memory is more than the linear cognitive memory that we have about a past event but we also experience them as bodily memories. We have a "felt sense" about something that seems familiar but unclear.

What I also discovered from the stories was how often the women had been discouraged from singing and playing around you, but, in spite of this, they continued to seek you out. I wondered what you thought about these points?

Dewe-i-gan: Well, maybe we could start with what the women had to say about this.

Me: Okay. Like I said, all the women spoke about being discouraged primarily by their male mentors. The beliefs of the men were that women should not be sitting around you; rather, they should be sitting outside of the circle in what has been referred to as a more supportive role. Ann shared that there were two important male mentors in her life, and one of those men no longer believes that women should sit with you in that way. The other, who was taught by his mother, believed that it was okay, as you represent the heartbeat of the Creator (Torrie, 2004) and that it was a woman who first brought the big drum to the people.

Dewe-i-gan: I am sorry to hear that these women have been discouraged to follow what they believe is their truth. Perhaps this struggle is part and parcel of their unique healing journeys? I travel with people but do not claim to know all there is to know; that is the job of the Creator. I am interested in how the women dealt with this discouragement.

Me: Well, my understanding is that through the encouragement of mentors, through the support of other women drummers, and through "going inward" to listen to their dreams and visions, they found their own truth and trusted in it enough to continue on. Baskin (2006) shared Ermine's quote,

> Aboriginal epistemology speaks of pondering great mysteries that lie no further than the self . . . thus, in order to find meanings in the world around us; we must continuously explore our inner selves. . . . Aboriginal worldviews incorporate ways of turning inward for the purposes of finding meanings through prayer, fasting, dream interpretation, ceremonies and silence. (p.1)

Susan shared "When my son's dad was terminal, drumming and singing was a way that I prayed and supported my son." So, by going inward, Susan was able to find the strength to support her son.

Mary also spoke about turning inward through ceremony. During a sweat lodge, she found out that she was *windigokan* (meaning she does things contrary to what might be expected) and received an explanation as to why the drum had come to her. Mary shared, "At the sweat they acknowledged my son's name [who had passed on] and said that's why you carry that drum."

Ann spoke about having four dreams regarding drums before she received her own drum. She shared, "The significance for me was getting that validation from the spirit world."

Dewe-i-gan: Yes, so the women found meaning through ceremony, prayer, and their dreams, by journeying inward. They also talked about relationship and how important their mentors were, how important it was to find like-minded women, and to drum with other women. All these relationships gave the women the encouragement to continue

on in spite of their negative experiences. Like my friend, Wilson (2008) shared earlier, it is all about strong, healthy relationships.

Me: Yes. Here are some of the comments the women made:

> Most of all, learning about all the other women drummers that were out there, not just on the hand drum, which is beautiful in itself, but knowing that there are so many other women drum groups, big drum groups out there. (Ann)

> With your drum sisters you can tell them anything that's going on, they go "yeah, me too." We share our stories, good bonding, and good to get up and bring your children. (Mary)

> I loved it [drumming]. Maggie [mentor] was awesome. We hung out and would do everything together; was like a family, you have drum practices, and you'd also go out and do things with each other. (Betty)

> [. . .] it also had a lot to do with the encouragement, the silent encouragement that I saw from the other women around the drum, the smiles and nods, the thumbs up. (Ann)

So again, in these stories the women are talking about the importance of relationship, feeling connected and a sense of belonging, and how this has been central to their own healing. Hill (2006) shared "In their framework, Lowe and Struthers (2001) conceptualized connection as a dimension of relationship and a foundation for the components of building, healing, taking risks, creating togetherness, cohesiveness, unfolding, interrelating with all weaving, and transforming" (p. 212). Ann validated the importance of connection and belonging through her own healing process.

> As I mentioned before, two women murdered my mom when I was nine. So I lost my connection with a female role model of being mothered and nurtured that was taken away by two women. It really brought a lot of distrust in my life of other women. So drumming with other women has been the best thing to happen for me. It has reconnected me to other women, brought back that connection I lost long ago.

Here, Ann was talking about how painful and traumatic loss of connection can be. So it is the mentors, other women drummers and the connection and sense of belonging she experiences with her immediate drum group that has been healing for her. I also recall Ann telling me that each person's healing journey is unique to them. This makes me think of that idea of multiple realities and how each woman will experience that healing in a different way and at different times.

Dewe-i-gan: Yes, this is good then. That is why the Great Spirit made me in a circular fashion to remind those who sit around me that we are all one; we are all connected, including in relation with all of Creation. As Hill (2006) said earlier "when people come together in a circle, there is a spirit of oneness and sense of sacredness" (p. 210). Deep healing can occur as a result. For those who understand my teachings, they know that I was made to assist with sacred matters. Tell me more of what the women have to say about this?

Me: Well, it seems to me from the stories shared that the women do understand that drumming is spiritual. Women spoke about drumming as healing and as being sacred. There is a belief that you represent the heartbeat of all of Creation. You remind us that we are connected to all things through the heartbeat. Comments the women have shared include:

> I just always think that the drumming heartbeat, it's got to be healing, how can you not hear your heartbeat? (Susan)

> Healing starts spiritually from our way, the spirit comes in to help so when we're in those darkroom ceremonies we're singing. Not for "support" for the actual healing, if everything is connected and everything has a spirit or an energy vibration, then unhealthiness, sickness, dis-ease, they all have one as well and before you can heal the physical part or whatever it is that needs rebalancing, you need to ask that spirit to leave first. (Joan)

> When you're singing and drumming and focussing solely on what you're creating with each other, you're not just connecting with yourself, or with the other women—you're connecting with the energy around you. The animal world from the skin of the drum, the plant world with the ring and the smudge, spirit when you sing those songs and sound a drum that's been blessed. (Joan)

Dewe-i-gan: Oh yes, this speaks again to Indigenous ontology; reality is more than what is perceived with the physical eyes.

Me: Yes, this energy that the women spoke about cannot be seen with the physical eye, but nevertheless, it is present. The energy is created when they are singing around you and this energy in turn is said to create healing.

Joan put it this way,

> When I'm drumming and find that place inside and pull it out. It's just an energy connection and when you have a few women around the drum sounding it and singing, it's like meditating but meditation on steroids when it's good. When you're singing and drumming and focussing solely on what you're creating with each other, you're not just connecting with yourself or with the other women—you're connecting with the energy around you.

Kenny (2014) has also spoken about music as energy. She shared "that healing spaces are spaces of loving and creating that join us to the great river—the artery that flows through all of humanity and all living things" (p. 3).

Kenny (2014) went on to talk about musical ritual and the concept of power that can bring us into certain states of consciousness. She continued,

> Once we experience ritual space, our consciousness begins to fly into another open space—a space of innovation and play of new patterns of existence, a place of dreams and songs, of new healing images of all kinds, metaphors, new behaviors, new feelings and thoughts. (p. 6)

She went on,

> Once we are free to travel, we feel our power. Power is a closed space. It builds energy over time. Then breaks free into new embodiment, confidence, renewal, and revitalization . . . I'm quite sure that if you experienced a drumming circle, you have experienced such power. (p. 7)

Although the previous comments shared by the women participants were in relation to a group experience at the big drum, Susan showed us how this healing space can occur with one or two people on hand drums. Susan shared how the energy of the drum created a "good feeling' within her and for those around her.

> To sing for them and with my cousin, who is a residential school survivor, it was good. It was good because it wasn't thinking about people as victims, it was thinking of them as survivors. To think about them as being warriors, thinking about them as being totally amazing. When I look at someone like my mother and her siblings and know that they were able to keep their language going no matter what happened to them. It was the energy of the drum in recognition of the residential survivors in a good way.

So it is about creating a healing space whether you are in a larger group at the big drum, or just one or two people playing smaller drums; this energy has an effect on all those for whom it is intended. It's not only for the women around the drum but for all those who are attracted to the drum.

Dewe-i-gan: Yes, there seem to be some similarities in describing this healing space or this "good feeling space." So it is about developing another state of consciousness as a way to empower ourselves and all those we are connected to, opening up to possibilities, opening up so we can hear from those who have gone before us. I would also expect that the focus and energy would be slightly different based on the purpose of why the women drummers have come together. What other ways have the women spoken about drumming and its relationship to healing?

Me: Yes, it is important to point out the context of the drumming circle and what purpose or goals the women have in coming together. Joan spoke to this,

> It is different practicing; it's different from when we're singing for someone. The drum travels, the drum takes us when we are all together with women. Depending on where the drum is taking us, it's a little bit different.

In the talking circles, the women shared that they have used drumming for multiple purposes. So although the sacred ceremonies discussed so far have been healing, there are less formal gatherings that also proved to be healing for the women. Mary expressed the idea here:

> Sitting around the drum, sharing our voices. We are usually giggling and laughing or talking about how hard our day was, bonding and encouraging. With your drum sisters you can tell them anything that's going on, they go "yeah, me too."

Joan shared, "The people that I drum with, they are family. It's more than just the drum."

Dewe-i-gan: Yes, that makes sense to me. You mentioned earlier the importance of connection and the social support that the drum group provides to women. I also hear Mary talking about elements of play, humour, and joy that the women experience around the drum.

Me: Yes, that is a great point. There was quite a bit of laughter and joking when we had our talking circle, which is definitely healing. It is a great way to release pent up emotions. It also gives us a temporary break or some distance from difficult emotions when we feel it is all too much.

Dewe-i-gan: What does my friend, Carolyn Kenny, share about this idea of play?

Me: Kenny (2014) pointed out that "play is an intensely important aspect of healing. . . . It represents perceiving new possibilities beyond limitations and previously patterned boundaries" (p. 6). And there is certainly a lot of humour and play within Indigenous cultures.

I believe that there is an experience that people have when they are struggling with something difficult in their lives, and I refer to it as a state of "stuckness." They feel stuck in their pain and suffering; I know I have experienced this in my own life. According to Kenny (2014), play opens you up to possibilities. It can shift you out of this state of stuckness.

When Kenny (2014) spoke about her theory of music therapy, she shared that there are seven fields: the aesthetic; the musical space; the field of play; ritual; power; a particular state of consciousness; and creative process. I will address three of the fields here starting with the concept of musical space. Kenny (2014) described musical space as "a place of being that is not limited by the techniques I might use with patients and clients. . . . The fields of engagement change when a patient or client feels secure in the musical space" (p. 6). Although she was talking specifically about music therapy sessions, which are facilitated by a music therapist, I think a similar experience can occur in the drum circle experience if members feel supported. Kenny (2014) continued "all at once there is a new freedom and sometimes a joyful sense of discovery, experimentation, and a new energy in the play. I call this Field of Play" (p. 6). Although Kenny (2014) does not use the same terms as the women, the women have talked about feeling secure in their own musical space as well as trusting in the drum. This seems to be foundational in allowing them to open up to the sacred.

Dewe-i-gan: Yes, play is a part of healing. As I see it, healing is holistic, which is reflected in how Creator made me. My circular shape reminds the Anishinaabe (human beings) of the medicine wheel teachings and how important it is to strive for balance within those four aspects of being a human: the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. I think play can help us strive for balance in a joyful way. Tell me more about what was shared.

Me: The women shared stories of loss through death, cultural, familial, and community losses as a result of the fallout from colonization. Through their relationship with you, they spoke of feeling reconnected. A large women's drum gathering solidified the healing nature of the drum for Betty, an adoptee.

> I guess my "a-ha" moment was when we went down to Alabama. That was about four years ago. It was at a women's drum gathering; there were a lot of drums and a lot of women. I thought to myself "wow, we can change the world!" (Betty)

For Susan, she found the emotional and spiritual strength needed to support her son through the loss of his father.

> When my son's dad was terminal, drumming and singing was a way that I prayed and supported my son. (Susan)

She also spoke to how listening to music can sometimes help in focussing her mind as a way to self-soothe.

> When I [would] listen to drum music on a CD, I would use it as a way of calming myself, or meditation. (Susan)

Personal experiences impact all areas of the Medicine Wheel. Ann spoke about how shy she was in the beginning of her drumming journey and how, over time, she

was able to develop her listening skills and to establish some distance from the pain in her life. She explained,

> Being able to recognize the leads . . . [and] shut down what was happening, all of the hurt and the sadness that was going on in my life, to be able to hear what was happening at that drum.

Other experiential words the women shared that reflect the emotional and mental aspects of the medicine wheel were: "becoming aware"; "letting go"; "working through disruptions"; "opening up"; "calming and focussing"; and this idea of finding their voice. So let me share with you some thoughts on the voice.

Dewe-i-gan: Yes, good, because the way I see it, the voice is inseparable to drumming. What did the women say about singing? Maybe we can hear from our Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars as well. I think everyone's point of view is important when we are talking about acknowledging multiple realities.

Me: Yes, I agree with that. Within the shared stories there was discussion on this idea of finding your voice. The women talked about how they connected with their voice and through building relationships with you, they became empowered to use their voices. Some of the things the women said were:

> It was something that was given to me from my friend…when she encouraged me to sing. She told me that I had a beautiful voice; she said you have a nice voice, you have a strong voice. Use it. Don't let people take that away from you. So it really encouraged me and helps me to have that confidence. (Ann)
> To me that drum is like healing. So I don't think I ever would. I think it helps a lot of women to be stronger and to get their voices out. It is part of our healing; it is part of our children's healing, part of the community healing. (Mary)

In her dissertation, Susan Summers (2014) wrote about singing and healing: "During singing there is a resonance created inside our bodies that reflects our own unique energy vibration—that which makes us unique as a person" (p. 28). Ann spoke to this

when she stressed the importance of drumming groups to be welcoming towards women in order for them to learn how "to be comfortable with hearing their voice, to be comfortable with sounding their voice." Here, she stressed the importance of women developing a relationship with their unique voice. So when one's voice is shut down, that "unique energy" representing who they are as spiritual beings, is prevented from coming fully forward. Summers (2014) quoted another scholar (Oddy) who stated:

> When the singer allows himself or herself free reign to use the voice, he or she can become accepting of the authentic voice, the voice that contains the beauty of who that person is. (p. 52)

And this is what I see the women seeking from you, Dewe-i-gan: an opportunity to express their authentic voice within a cultural framework that makes sense to who they are as Ojibway-Cree-Anishinaabe women.

So this brings me to my last point in relation to healing and the drum which the women frequently spoke about. Through the music, each woman spoke of the importance of passing on the culture to the younger generation.

Dewe-i-gan: Yes. Connection, relationship, reciprocity and responsibility. These women feel a responsibility to pass on their cultural teachings to the next generation, to give back in hopes that their children will do the same. The songs keep us alive. I believe it was David Courchene (Torrie, 2004) who said that without the songs, the voice of the people cannot be heard.

Me: Let me share what the women had to say about this:

> Drumming is just about everything to me. I have my little ones now and I want to teach them to sing too. I sing to them every morning as I'm driving my little guy to daycare, the Bear song. When I sing as I am driving, it is about having that connection with the next generation . . . but also giving them a connection to our ancestors where the songs originally came from. (Ann)

Susan shared,

> My other experience was when I went to some of the schools; I made a little video of pow-wow dancing and went to the elementary schools to teach little children pow-wow dancing. It was so much fun and what was nice about it is that the teachers came back to us and said "I didn't even know that kid knew how to a pow-wow dance, or that that kid was First Nations or that kid was Métis."
>
> There is lots of healing to drumming and going to pow-wow gatherings. It is part of our healing; it is part of our children's healing, part of the community healing. (Mary)
>
> When we are singing, our ceremonies, our Sun Dance, our shake tents, all the ceremonies that help me every day and my daughter. I don't want her to see or go down the path that I went down, going to drugs and alcohol. I don't want her to see that. I'll do everything I can so that she doesn't go down that road, so she doesn't feel that pain. So she doesn't choose alcohol and drugs but chooses our traditional ways where there is so much love and caring. (Betty)
>
> My kids grew up to drum. They had a little rattle and drum in their hands before they had their little toys. (Joan)

Dewe-i-gan: Yes, intergenerational healing, and passing on the teachings so the voice of the people can be heard.

Me: I have one more theme that came up when I spoke with the women drummers. It relates to the more practical aspects of drumming/singing and that is around skill development. Three of the women talked about how they have grown in their musical development and how this led to them feeling more self-confidence.

Joan shared,

> You learn and progress as you work together and try things out on your own and learn songs and how to sing together. As you progress you grow in your skills and things you never noticed before, you notice now.

Mary said "I've been given the gift to make songs."

Ann highlighted,

> Maggie and Susan and us women, we're making our drumsticks, all together they said we need a manager, I said yes we do, but they we're asking me to be the manager. I've been doing this for several years.

Dewe-i-gan: Yes, it sounds like these women have developed their musicianship skills as well as their leadership skills. So, from where I stand, these women have found healing through their Dewe-i-gan. This is good. I would now be interested in hearing more about your experience of transformation through the relationships and connections you made through me.

Me: Yes, I think now would be a good time to share some of my thoughts.

ékosáni Dewe-i-gan.

(Please see Appendix E for a visual snap shot of my conversation with Dewe-i-gan)

Chapter Seven: Transformation and Learning

Transformation of Researcher

In the first chapter I spent some time locating myself, so the reader would gain some understanding of who I am in this role as researcher. With Absolon's (2010) Indigenous Wholistic [*sic*] Theory, she highlighted the importance of stating our position in letting others know who we are and who we are not. In addressing this teaching and sharing only from where I sit and where I am located (Absolon, 2010), I will discuss what I have learned about myself through this research process and share with you my conclusions. So as a participant in the research study, I will briefly return for a moment to the Eastern door, to the beginning where it all started before moving to the North door, the door of "healing in being and doing" (Absolon, 2010, p. 82). I will conclude at the center, where it all comes together, and make my final comments.

As a participant in this study, I would to like to share with you some of the thoughts, feelings, and experiences I have had as they relate to identity and belonging. Indigenous identity has become a complicated matter. Both Rowe (2013) and Anderson (2000) discussed the complexities of this terrain as it relates to people of mixed blood (persons born of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents), which in part reflects some of my own experiences. Kovach (2009) spoke about her own identity issues in relation to adoption, and Chandler and Lalonde (1998) have emphasized the importance of cultural continuity as an important factor in the health and wellbeing of Indigenous people. All the women in this study spoke to the importance of belonging and connection in their own healing. At this point it would be prudent of me to share

with you some familial context in relation to how I developed my thinking with regard to Indigenous identity and experiences of belonging and connectedness.

As I shared earlier, my mother was born on the Misipawistik Cree Nation and was one of twelve children. Her mother also was born in Grand Rapids, and her father was born on the St. Peter's Reserve, now known as Peguis First Nation. Both of my maternal grandparents lived a land-based life style, trapping and fishing, with grandma doing most of the childcare and a multitude of other tasks in bringing up twelve children. My father, one of nine children, was born in Sydney, Nova Scotia. His mother arrived from Liverpool, England on the shores of Nova Scotia at the age of 15; his father was born in Port aux Basque, Newfoundland and may have been of Scottish descent—an important part of my family history that requires more research. My paternal grandfather worked in the Sydney Steel Mill and my grandmother worked out of the home, looking after kids and doing what was needed for their survival.

Overall we had more contact with my mother's side of the family than we had with my father's side. In part this may have been due to the geographical distance, but, I am not convinced that was the only reason. My maternal grandparents both spoke Cree, and my grandfather apparently spoke Oji-Cree as well. Since I could not speak the language, and both of my grandparents would not speak English, we did very little talking. Much of what I learned about my grandparents was through direct observation and through stories that were shared with me by other family members. Although it seemed to be a tense time for my mother when we visited, I always found it to be a good time. My sisters and I would spend most of our time outdoors, swimming in Lake

Winnipeg, playing with other children and experiencing a freedom in movement that you just can't experience in an urban setting.

I would describe our family ties as a dance of disconnection and reconnection. During the disconnecting times, it would seem as if they did not exist as there was little discussion about my mother's life; at least, not until I was much older and began to address some of what I saw as confusing family happenings. There were two different worlds in my mind and I struggled to make sense of what it all meant within my life in relation to who I was, where I came from, and essentially where I belonged. These questions reflect different periods of my life, searching more earnestly for answers, depending on life's circumstances at the time. Once again, I bring these historical happenings forward to give the reader some context as to who I am and where I come from, which is relevant to what I have learned through this study.

One of the issues that surprised me in this study was the resurfacing of the issue of belonging and identity. At first this discouraged me. My inner critic, convinced that identity is an age-bound process (Rowe, 2013), chastised me for returning to this question yet again. I reminded myself that these questions are not static; they are layered and reflect my own unique healing journey. It is a healing process that takes us around the medicine wheel. I struggle to remain open to what has arisen and gently put a stop to my inner critic so that I may look with compassion at what this is all about. Sometimes you move around the wheel of life ending up in one direction, only to find yourself back in the direction from which you felt you moved. Rowe (2013) emphasized how identity development is no longer considered to be age-bound, but is rather a journey within which our overall wellbeing is intrinsically linked" (p. 79). I

think Couture (1991) explained his internal process well when referring to his experiences of identity development:

> It has been an extensive exercise in patient eradication of fears, in experiential discovery of life-force, of energy as Isness and Oneness, of my individuality in relationship with self, with others, and with the cosmos. (p. 54)

I think this is true for myself as well; however, I would add the feeling of shame, which I believe is intertwined with fear, and is central to the experience of internalized colonization, which is essentially what I am addressing here.

Although the purpose for doing this study was to explore the relationship between healing and Dewe-i-gan, I also discovered that as much as the women spoke of Dewe-i-gan as a healing force in their lives, they also spoke of suffering and pain surrounding Dewe-i-gan. Speaking to this pain, I would like to share with you a personal experience I had prior to this study that relates to the issue of identity. The memory of this resurfaced during the course of the study, which I documented in my drum diary.

A while back, I had an experience of creating a big drum, for the first time, with a number of other women who I knew. The process and ceremony of making the drum took two days and it was a very meaningful and affirming experience for me. Once the drum was completed, I looked forward to the first time that we would come together as a group and sound the drum for the first time. This event was full of meaning and it was important for me to be present when this occurred. It was like being part of birthing the drum into existence. This was not the first time that I had made a drum, as I had made a hand drum in the past, but it was the first time I made a big drum together with other women. In any case, the moment of playing the drum for the first time never

came, as our leader at the time had made other plans for Dewe-i-gan. As there was no explanation for why this decision was made, I felt hurt by this experience. And so, reflective of human nature, I came up with my own explanation; one which reflected those old wounds of rejection and feelings of disconnection related to my identity as a Cree/Métis/English woman. At the time I wondered whether I was being overly sensitive and tried to push away my feelings, but, months later, there I was writing about the experience in my drum journal. Kovach (2009) talks about the importance of identity as someone who was adopted into a Hungarian family. She shared how she attempted to "conform to the outsider's view of the Indigenous standard" and how she "failed miserably" at it (p. 9). Not completely the same, but I think there are some similar experiences for people of mixed blood (Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents) which Rowe (2013) wrote about in her thesis. Rowe (2013) cited King in addressing the personal experiences that people are faced with in terms of identity:

> Yet in the absence of visual confirmation, these "touchstones"—race, language, blood—still form a kind of authenticity test, a racial-reality game that contemporary Native people are forced to play. And here are some of the questions. Were you born on reserve? Small rural towns with high Native populations will do. Cities will not. Do you speak your Native language? Not a few phrases here and there. Fluency is the key. No fluency, no Indian. Do you participate in your tribe's ceremonies? Being a singer or dancer is a plus, but not absolutely required. Are you full blood? Are you a status Indian? Are you enrolled? (p. 13)

I would add that the "outsider" is not the only one to impose this Indigenous standard, but, it is also done by our own people. Colonialism has created conflict and disconnection within our communities in regard to this Indigenous standard of who belongs and who doesn't. In this situation I assumed that in our leader's eyes, I did not belong. Whether this was the case or not, I share this story as it reflects my inner

experience as a woman of "mixed-blood." Indigenous identity is complex and what I realize now, similar to the process of recovering from grief and loss, is that it happens when it happens. There is no time limit in discovering who you are or what you can become. To quote Couture (1991) again,

> It has been an extensive exercise in patient eradication of fears, in experiential discovery of life-force, of energy as Isness and Oneness, of my individuality in relationship with self, with others, and with the cosmos. (p. 54)

As he emphasized, it is an exercise of patience. So here I am, patiently peeling the layers off, discovering that there are still some wounds that need attention, remembering that as we give air to these wounds, they eventually heal.

What the women in this study shared and what I have come to understand through this process is that "it's more than the drum." As much as Dewe-i-gan brings us joy and connection, we can also experience sadness and disconnection. The women in this study talked about their experiences of disconnection when they were told they could not sing, or play at the big drum, or were humiliated and shunned for doing so; they also spoke of joyfulness, play and connection. You can't experience joy without experiencing sadness, and so it goes; the wheel keeps turning round and round.

Two remaining points I would like to discuss regarding my own learning have to do first with the practical aspects of trying to complete an Indigenous research study within a very short time; the second point is related to the process I went through in attempting to analyze the stories within an Indigenous framework. I will start by discussing the first point related to having to enforce a strict time limitation on my study, which in itself seems contradictory to Indigenous practices.

Once I received word that I was accepted into the PhD program I was instantly faced with a dilemma. Do I complete the Indigenous Governance program, knowing that I still have to complete all of my course work before even starting the thesis, or do I drop out of the program and save myself a huge amount of stress? If I dropped out then I could relax over the summer and be well rested for the start of the PhD program in the fall. Here I was, talking about Indigenous research and I had this strict time frame within which I had to contend. Should I continue or not? In moving forward I worried as to whether or not I could do justice to the study if I felt pressured to complete it in such a short time frame. I worried as to whether I could honour the voices of the women participants in a good way.

The interesting thing is every time I started to lose hope in completing the study, something would happen to push me forward. On one occasion I received an e-mail from one of the participants (who I had known previously), asking me whether I had enough participants to move ahead. As the e-mail came at a time when I needed encouragement, I took this as a positive sign and decided to move forward. On another occasion, I again began to feel discouraged about the progress of the study. Shortly after, I received confirmation that I was awarded a research grant. One last example I would like to share occurred while I had been sitting at my computer struggling yet again with my negative thoughts as to the significance of what I was doing. Just at that moment, I heard a sound come from my drum, which was placed on a bench behind me. It was a unique sound that seemed to last a few seconds and it made me stop what I was doing. At that very moment, what I believe I heard was a response to my thoughts and again it was confirmation I needed to continue. For the more skeptical mind, there

could have been a more "rational" explanation for what happened. Perhaps there was a shift in temperature and the skin on the drum tightened or loosened just at that moment. But for me, this signified one of those multiple realities and led me to again wonder if there was more at play here than I was conscious of. Again I chose to see this experience as not merely a coincidence but a spiritual sign that the study was important to complete. To me these experiences speak to Indigenous ways of knowing, paying attention to what may not appear obvious to another. It is a turning inward and trusting that even though you don't fully understand, things happen for a reason.

This leads me to my second point, which is related to how I presented my findings through the assistance of Dewe-i-gan. One of the ethical principles that Kovach (2009) described in her book is that research methodology should be in line with Indigenous values. This principle continued to linger in the back of my mind throughout the meaning-making phase. I wanted this study to reflect Indigenous research methodology, and, therefore, I did not want to present data in a way that I felt reflected a western approach. At the beginning I tried looking at the stories from the perspective of breaking them down into themes, looking at key words and phrases that would fit under each category so that I could come up with a logical linear way to present the material. As I read ideas on how to conduct data analysis for qualitative research, I experienced this internal resistance to the language that continued to reflect what I felt was western-based. I remember sitting at the dining room table close to tears with all these pieces of papers with various comments and themes everywhere, thinking "I can't do it this way; it is not working." Of course, I could have used a computer program, but the method and the results are the same: the stories become fragmented. It

was during this struggle that I had an "a-ha" moment. I recalled two things: One was the seed that was planted in my mind by Professor Jerry Fontaine, in which he suggested I use the drum as methodology. At the time I was not totally sure what that entailed. So, although, I liked the idea, I did not know how I would implement it. The second source of inspiration came from Wilson's (2008) book *Research is Ceremony*. With these two sources coming together (and possibly others since we are dealing with multiple realities) I thought of having a conversation and sharing the women's stories with the drum. Although at that moment I was not sure how it would evolve, I felt and knew this method of analysis was a fit. In retrospect, I think the most transformative experience I gained from this study was the result of this particular struggle; to me it represents one of the core principles in conducting research from an Indigenous perspective.

Indigenous scholar, Margaret Kovach (2009) explained that through her work, she hoped to influence other Indigenous research students to pursue research from their own Indigenous frameworks. Perhaps sharing my own personal struggles in trying to complete this project, I too will influence and give courage to other graduate students who want to explore and apply Indigenous research methodologies. This would be good.

Future Considerations

Following the completion of my coursework, the study took place over the summer months. Once I received ethics approval, I began to formally recruit participants. As one would expect, the summer was a difficult time for people to make commitments. People take holidays, prepare for and attend ceremonies. Originally I had planned to

have the first talking circle around the third week of July but ended up postponing it, thinking that I could recruit a few more participants. Due to postponement of the start date, the women were not able to meet until the second weekend of August and I still had the same number of participants. I had been in contact with a few more women who were interested in the study, but again, people were away during my proposed dates. As it was important that I complete the story-gathering phase by the end of the summer, the second talking circle was held the following weekend. This gave the women one week to complete their symbol, which in retrospect was not enough time. In addition it turned out only two of the women could attend the second circle on the following Saturday. The Anishinaabe Symbol Based Reflection activity turned out to be a modified version of what I had originally planned. One woman wrote a story and the second woman shared symbols that she already had in her possession. Two to three weeks between the sessions would have been a more appropriate time frame in completing the symbols. I also think arranging one of the sessions during a weekday, early evening, would have helped. Most of the women worked and/or had children to look after, so attending the talking circle on the weekend was a sacrifice for them. In summary, the logistics regarding when, at what time, and how long between sessions created some challenges.

Bringing it All Together into the Center

Future Research and Conclusions. "Utilizing a wholistic [*sic*] analysis enables practitioners to better understand people in their whole context as the center really represents the cumulative aspects of all four doorways" (Absolon, 2010, p. 85). In addressing the cumulative aspects of this research, I would like to return to my

conversation with Dewe-i-gan and see what she thinks of all this. But, before I do this, I would like to share some of my ideas regarding future research.

I think there are so many different ways in which this topic could be explored further. It could involve women from all across Turtle Island, from East to West and North to South. As I mentioned, women pow-wow drummers are increasing and I would be interested in knowing "why now?" and "how does this relate to healing within a larger context?" Could this be described as what some people would refer to as a social movement or a contemporary process of Indigenous resurgence?

As there were no women water drummers involved in this study, it left me wondering what they could have added to this discussion on drumming and healing? Would they have similar views or somewhat different? This could be another potential area for further study. I would also be interested in hearing from men on the topic of healing and drumming and song, and/or do a comparative study between men and women drummers. Exploring different attitudes in relation to women drummers with both women and men drummers together would be an interesting study. Anderson (2000) spoke to the ways colonization has negatively impacted male and female relationships and roles, and how some Aboriginal men may use a more western patriarchal lens in teaching certain traditional/cultural practices. I can see this in relation to the big drum. One of the participants recently told me she heard that a woman drummer from Ontario had recently been threatened with violence if she participated at an upcoming event that included pow-wow drummers. I think this is a good example of what Anderson (2000) was talking about, and I would be curious to explore this further as it relates to the drum and/or colonial influence.

I am also very interested in learning more about the women's dance drum that Vennum (2009) talked about. He said the "women's dance drum (ikwe-niimi'idiwin) was slightly smaller than the big drum. It originated in a dream given to women because she couldn't dance when the ceremonial was first put on the face of the earth" (p. 86). According to this story, the drum was given to women because she could not dance; it says nothing about drumming and singing around the drum. So to me, this story contradicts some of the other teachings regarding women not being allowed to sit at the big drum. It would be interesting to find out what other drummers think of this story and whether it would alter their opinion regarding women sitting at the big drum. I think these topics are important to explore as they relate to the development of understanding and healing between men and women. It has the potential to build relationships.

Finally moving from the personal to the political, I think it is essential to explore the contributions that the arts make, in this case drumming and song, to public health and policy development. Not only to explore the contributions, but to apply what is learned to the development of policy.

Now, let us return to my previous conversation with Dewe-i-gan.

Me: I would now like to invite you to the center of the wheel, Dewe-i-gan, and have a brief discussion on the knowledge that has been shared and learned through our relationship with each other, the participants, and our movement through the four doors of the Medicine Wheel.

Dewe-i-gan: Yes, I am happy to share these last few words with you.

Me: If you could sum up what you have discovered from the women, what would you say?

Dewe-i-gan: I would say that through the women's own inner knowing, through their turning inward by listening to their dreams, their intuition, and connecting and receiving support from others, the women are connecting to the essence of who they are as Indigenous women. There is strength in connecting to their essence which then reverberates outwards, like a stone skidding across a calm lake.

Me: Yes, I believe Kenny (2006b) also agreed with you. She stated it in this way:

> Women are at the foundation of social change. And when the women are able to build on their strengths, continue to improve the quality of their lives, and obtain position in society, the nations will heal. (p. 551)

What I hear in your comments is the belief that personal healing is the first step toward social change. Alfred (2009) concurred, as he said the first step toward self-determination is personal healing, and that it is spiritual at its core.

Dewe-i-gan: éhé (yes)

Me: Do you think you have a role in this process?

Dewe-i-gan: From what I have been told, I see these women as actively reclaiming the drum, not in defiance of traditional practices, but for the protection and respect of what the spirit of their drum represents, teaches, and gives—not only for their personal benefit but also for the benefit of the larger community. I am also reminded of what Joan shared, "we go where the drum takes us . . ." and according to my friend, Iseke (2013), when we put ourselves in the Creator's hands, we are living in a decolonized state as spiritual beings; so every time we participate in ceremony we are in a process of decolonizing and transforming ourselves and so, yes, I certainly have a role in that.

Me: Can you tell me what you mean by the term decolonizing?

Dewe-i-gan: Hmm . . . I am going to have to rely on my academic friends in explaining these things, as I am not really used to speaking in this way. Having said that, my friend, Zavala (2013) defined "decolonization as an anti-colonial struggle that grows out of grassroots spaces" (p. 57). You can view it more as a process which "attempts to reveal and dismantle colonial power in all its forms" (Hart, 2007, cites Ashcroft et.al., 2000, p. 99). And, as you know, I have a responsibility in reminding Indigenous people of who they are and some of the responsibilities they have as Indigenous people, so this in itself is anti-colonial. Engaging with me is a process of decolonization.

Me: The personal then becomes the political (Kenny, 2002a). By practicing your cultural traditions, like drumming and song, you are engaged in a political act that is anti-colonial. ékosáni Dewe-i-gan. You have offered us many important teachings that go beyond individual healing. I give honour to you and thank you for your time.

I will now direct the reader to my concluding statement.

Conclusions and Final Thoughts

In Kenny's (1998) article, *The Sense of Art: A First Nations View*, she cited Chief Leonard George of the Burrard Nation in British Colombia:

> I believe that our song, dance, art, carving, basket making, and other art forms can provide the foundation for our autonomy, solidarity, self-determination and the means of keeping our spirit alive. (p. 77)

Although there have been radical attempts to obliterate Indigenous identity, Dewe-i-gan has played a role in keeping Indigenous peoples' spirits alive. The traditional teachings are still here; they come through the women's stories.

From my understanding, self-determination is about holding on to those traditions, values, ceremonies that reflect one's worldview. Dewe-i-gan, the songs, the stories, the dances, etc., are the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual resources of Indigenous people. These resources are meant to help maintain balance in people's lives, to empower and to assist individuals, families and communities to live in a "good way." Living in a good way is essential to good governance.

Although Alfred (2009) believed that there is a crisis of solidarity between Indigenous peoples and between many Indigenous leaders, the participants spoke about the importance of solidarity, and their own experiences related to solidarity. Betty shared,

> I guess my "a-ha" moment was when we went down to Alabama. That was about four years ago. It was at a woman's drum gathering; there were a lot of drums and a lot of women. I thought to myself "wow, we can change the world!" It was just beautiful to see, and all the different songs and every different kind of songs. There was me from up north, most of the people were from the States, it was just beautiful, the power of song and healing songs and healing . . . the beauty of it was amazing.

From my understanding, each of these women, individually and collectively, strive to transcend colonialism with the help of their Dewe-i-gan and through the relationships they have with each other and with the larger community. I will end with this final quote from Alfred and Corntassel (2005):

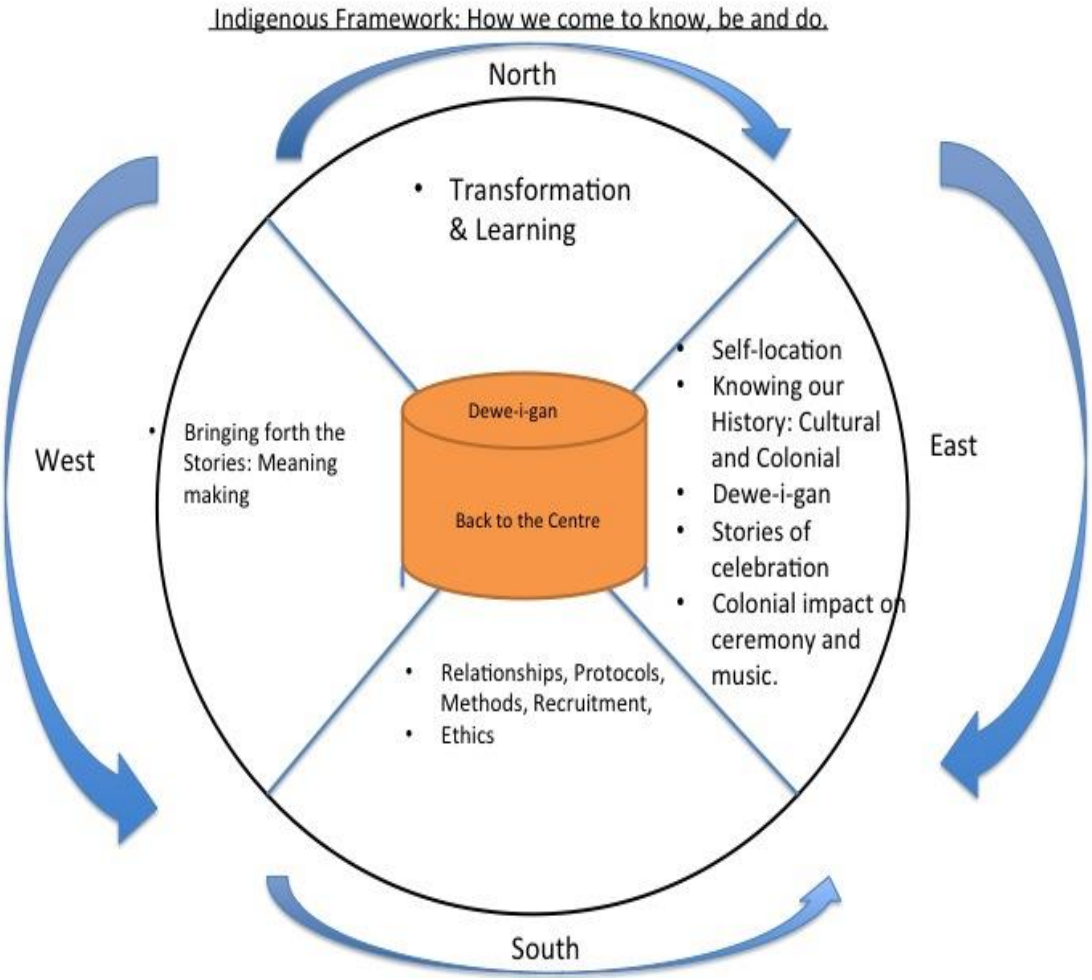
> Indigenous pathways of authentic action and freedom struggle start with people transcending colonialism on an individual basis—a strength that soon reverberates outward from self to family, clan, community and into all of the broader relationships that form an Indigenous existence. (p. 612)

The personal is indeed political. ékosáni, ekósi.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Medicine wheel slide: This is a visual description of my research process. The arrows indicate that the research process was not linear, but flowed back and forth.



Appendix B

(Information letter)

Exploring drumming/song and its relationship to healing in the lives of Indigenous women living in the city of Winnipeg.

I used Ghislaine Goudreau's (2006) Information letter as a template for this letter (pp.152-153).

Aanii, Tánisi, Bonjour, Hello,

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study designed to better understand the role that drumming plays in healing for Aboriginal women living in the City of Winnipeg. My name is Tamara Dicks and I am Peguis First Nation Band member and I am the primary researcher for this study. I am working towards the completion of my Master of Indigenous Governance at the University of Winnipeg. My thesis supervisory committee includes: Dr. Gabriel Nemogá, Dr. Jerry Fontaine and Dr. Carolyn Kenny. I have had a long-term interest in understanding the role of music in healing which is one of the reasons I chose to do this study. This study also recognizes that our people have always had the tools and cultural healing practices to pursue wellness and holistic healing to which the drum has played an important role. My final intention for doing this study is to benefit our younger generation. I hope that our youth benefit from the teachings that arise from this study and use the knowledge gained to assist them on their own healing journeys.

Sharing circles and interviews:

As part of this study, I will be holding two sharing circles and conducting one-on-one interviews if requested. I will be recruiting 6-8 women drummers to join the study. As part of the study, I will be asking you to create an art project that will reflect the meaning that drumming/song has for you. The supplies will be provided to you during our first sharing circle. The sharing circles will be approximately 2 weeks apart and likely will take no more than 2 hours at a time depending on how much people share.

Confidentiality:

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary and you may decide to withdraw from the study at any time. I will be audiotaping the circles and any one-on-one interviews so that I can document what is being said. I will be transcribing what you say and highlighting major themes. Once I have done this I will give you a copy so you can check the accuracy of what was shared. I will also be keeping my own personal journal to track of my own growth throughout this project. I will not be keeping any of your identifying information in my journal.

All your comments will be anonymous, your real name or other identifying information will not be used in the data or in any other publication unless given permission.

All data will be kept under lock and key as well as on a password protected computer.

Benefits and risks:

Meeting other women drummers and contributing to this study by adding your own experiences to what is known about women, drumming and healing may be of benefit to you.

Although there should be no serious risks to participating in the study, it is possible you may find that discussing your experiences or hearing other women's experiences emotionally upsetting. I will provide you with a list of resource people to contact if this does occur.

Research Results:

Once the data is collected, analyzed and interpreted, you will be provided with a copy to review and to make any changes if needed.

I would also add I intend to us the data and analysis/interpretation from this study in future scholarly presentations and publications.

Appendix C

Consent Form

Title of Study: Exploring drumming/song and its relationship to healing in the lives of Indigenous women living in the city of Winnipeg.

Principal Researcher: Tamara Dicks

Thesis Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Gabriel R. Nemogá-Soto, Dr. Jerry Fontaine, Dr. Carolyn Kenny.

Please read each item and then circle your answer.

Have you read and received a copy of the information sheet on the proposed study? yes no

Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this study? yes no

Have you had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study? yes no

Do you understand that you can withdraw from the study at anytime without explanation? yes no

Has the issue of confidentiality/anonymity been explained to you? yes no

Do you understand that your anonymity cannot be guaranteed? yes no

Signature of Research Participant **Date**

_____

Signature of Researcher **Date**

_____

- **(Created by Goudreau, 2006, p. 156 with slight modification)**

Appendix D

Conversation Guide

A) How have the women participants integrated drumming/song into their lives?

1) When did you first start drumming?
2) How long have you been playing the drum?
3) How does drumming fit into your life? Is there a set practice that you follow?
4) Do you primarily play alone or with other people?

B) How would you describe healing?

C) At what point in your life did you discover that there was a relationship between drumming and healing?

D) How has drumming and song promoted healing within the lives of the participants? Please offer as much description as possible.

1) From a holistic perspective, meaning physically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually, how has drumming and song impacted your life?

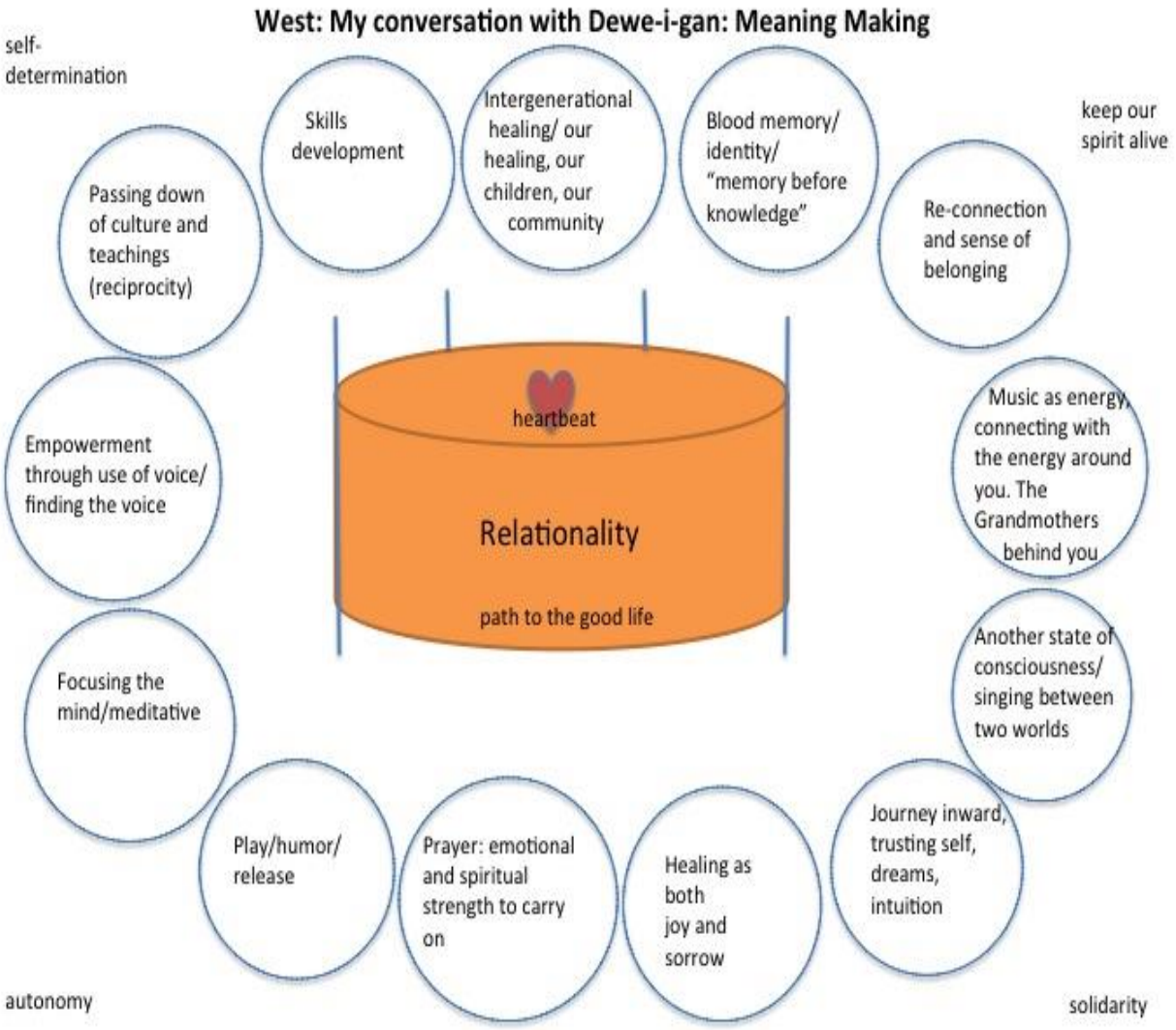
2) Have you had any healing experiences while listening to drum music? If so can you share this experience in as much detail as you can? Meaning how you felt physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually?

3) Have you had any healing experiences while playing the drum and singing? If so can you share this experience in as much detail as you can?

E) Is there anything you would like to add that I have not asked you?

Appendix E

A visual representation of the conversation I had with Dewe-i-gan in which I have highlighted the main ideas.



Appendix F

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Gabriel Nemogá-Soto

Chair DGC and Associate Professor

(Department of Indigenous Studies)

Dr. Jerry Fontaine, Departmental Member

Adjunct Professor

(Department of Indigenous Studies)

Dr. Carolyn Kenny, External Member

Professor Emerita

Human Development and Indigenous Studies

Antioch University Ph.D. in Leadership and Change

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